

# The Issue of Solipsism in the Early Works of Sartre and Wittgenstein

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## Abstract

Solipsism was conceived as a preliminary to grounding knowledge in the seventeenth century. This doctrine suggested that, in order to achieve certainty, one had to temporarily admit the conceivability of doubt about the existence of other minds and the external world as a whole. The existence of the external world was then taken to be established by means of proofs of the existence of a unique creator, or assured by means of transcendental deduction. By comparison, nothing seems to prove the existence of others. On the one hand, nothing seems to count as proof *a posteriori* of the existence of others, for the doubt it would dispel cannot be grounded in experience. On the other hand, nor can a proof which would dispel such doubt be produced *a priori*, for the empirical and generalized absence of others is conceivable *a posteriori*. Thus, nothing seems to exclude the possibility of an *a priori* discovery of one's unicity. This thesis endeavours to bring out the similarity of the treatment of this difficulty by Sartre and Wittgenstein. Each of these philosophers confronted the illusion of confinement that presupposes admitting the generalized absence of others. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre proposes a conceptual means to establish that the theoretical problem of the existence of other minds is a pseudo-problem. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein proposes to dissolve the philosophical problems of the existence of the external world and the existence of other minds via reflexion on the intelligibility conditions of expression. Both cases involve dispelling the appearance that doubt about the world and other minds is possible and required. Not only that proof of the existence of other minds is impossible, it is also superfluous. To require such a proof therefore can lead to nothing but missing the obviousness of our commitments to others, and thereby to denying their existence.

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# Abbreviations of Primary References

## Works by Sartre:

BN — *Being and Nothingness*, translated by H. E. Barnes, 2003, London: Routledge.

TE — *The Transcendence of the Ego*, translated by A. Brown, 2004, London: Routledge.

## Works by Wittgenstein:

NB — *Notebooks 1914-1916*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1979, London: Basil Blackwell.

TLP — *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by C. K. Ogden, 2003, New York: Barnes and Noble.

PI — *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 2009, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Modifications of translations of the quoted editions and uses of different translations are specified where relevant.

# The Issue of Solipsism in the Early Works of Sartre and Wittgenstein

## Introduction

The present thesis examines the issue of solipsism in the early works of Sartre and Wittgenstein. Understood etymologically, “solipsism” would mean “I am the only one there could be” or “there is only one existence that is certain, which is my own”, and affirming it would call into question the existence of other minds. I will attempt to show that, beginning with their early works, both Sartre and Wittgenstein treat the issue of solipsism as arising from an implicit engagement with fiction (i.e., a product of imagination). An implicit engagement with fiction contrasts with an explicit one. An author who writes a novel has the explicit aim, possibly among others, of producing fiction. But this is not the case with solipsism, which was not initially presented as such.

In this introduction, I will outline how solipsism was confronted in philosophy during the seventeenth century and how it passed through at least two stages before being addressed by Sartre and Wittgenstein. To do so, I will first spell out explicitly what I suggest to be the concern that solipsism was initially meant to answer. Then I will present an outline of two philosophical solutions that were provided to this concern and which shaped the way in which the issue of solipsism has been received, contributing to the ways in which it was dealt with both by Sartre and Wittgenstein.

Am I alone in the world? When I am alone somewhere, there is no one other than me where I am. When I am somewhere with others, there are others where I am. Yet, could I not doubt this? After all, I could believe myself to be alone somewhere while I am not. Someone could be observing me, and I could remain ignorant of this and discover it only afterwards. I also could believe myself to be in the presence of one or several persons while there is no one there: for example, I could think I have seen someone when I am in the forest, only to find out it is a log. I could also think that there is a group of people on top of a hill at a

distance, then notice they are statues as I draw closer. To think that I am in the presence of one or several persons does not amount to being in the presence of one or several persons. Could I not, then, doubt their existence? The feeling of solitude does not always depend on whether I am in fact in the presence of someone. I may not feel alone while I am, for example, working in my room. But I could feel alone while in the presence of someone or even within a crowd. To feel alone does not always depend on the presence of someone in my surroundings. Do I not, then, have a reason to feel alone if I can think that I am alone while I am not, just as I may be alone while believing I am not? Am I alone in the world?

### The Question of the Truth of Solipsism

Descartes' enterprise can be understood as an attempt to dispel this doubt and to end gratuitous affirmations such as this through metaphysical meditation. If I mention Descartes, it is first of all because he is often presented as a contributor to the history of discussions of scepticism, notably by Clarke (1972) and Conant (2012). Conant presents that the sceptical problematic addressed by Descartes as centred on "how to distinguish between dreaming that one is experiencing something and *actually* experiencing it" (Conant, 2012, p. 4). This sceptical problematic is different from a solipsistic problematic that Descartes also addresses at various occasions:<sup>1</sup>

If the objective reality of any one of my ideas be so great that I am certain it cannot be in me either formally or eminently, and that consequently I cannot myself be the cause of it, it necessarily follows that I am not alone in the world and that there is likewise existing some other thing, which is the cause of this idea. Were no idea of this kind to be met with in me, I should have no argument sufficient to render me certain of the existence of anything different from me. (Descartes, 1958, pp. 201-202)

In this passage, Descartes focuses on the potential truth of solipsism and suggests that one needs to be certain that one is not alone in the world. In this context, this specifically means providing an answer to the question whether God exists. However, unlike Malebranche and Berkeley, Descartes does not explicitly raise the problem of others minds: i.e., the question of how we can know of the

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<sup>1</sup> Other confrontations with a solipsistic problematic can be found in Descartes (1958, p. 121; p. 204; p. 209; p. 220).

existence other minds.<sup>2</sup> In what follows, I outline the way in which Descartes confronts the solipsistic problematic along the lines of the above quoted passage.

In order to dispel doubt about whether one is alone in the world, one can admit the transitional conceivability of doubt about the existence of the external world as a whole (and thus, implicitly, that of other minds as well). I can doubt my senses insofar as I can commit mistakes concerning what I perceive. I can even admit that I can pretend to be situated nowhere or not have a body. That I can do this nevertheless involves that I can think, and I cannot even pretend that this is not the case (Descartes, 1958, p. 119). That I can think myself to be alone in the world means that there is something that thinks this. This something is the one that thinks when it thinks in the first person: I am, I exist. But can I not then imagine that this is not the case when I do not think this? I could, for instance, imagine an evil genius who could systematically delude me into mistakenly thinking that I exist. Yet to imagine this requires that such an evil genius could itself have a model: i.e., to imagine a being that could delude me systematically requires the ability to think of a perfect being who would not do so. I may thus establish that the “thinking thing” could not think of itself without finding in itself the mark of its creator: i.e., the idea of a perfect being able to produce it, which it could not have received from experience. And it is then proven that there is a world. The sufficient reason for my existence is the existence of God whose existence can be proven *a posteriori*, as emphasized by Spinoza (2002, p. 134). Notably, the very term “solipsism” appears at this epoch with the publication of *Monarchia Solipsorum* (Scotti, 1651), in which Melchior Inchofer, under a

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<sup>2</sup> Both Malebranche and Berkeley question the manner in which we can know about other minds. Berkeley (1996, p. 89) suggests that this knowledge is inherently mediate:

145. From what hath been said, it is plain that we cannot know the existence of other spirits, otherwise than by their operations, or the ideas by them excited in us. [...] Hence the knowledge I have of other spirits is not immediate, as is the knowledge of my ideas [...].

In this approach:

A human spirit or person is not perceived by sense, as not being an idea. [...] Hence it is plain, we do not see a man, if by man is meant that which lives, moves, perceives, and thinks as we do: but only such a certain collection of ideas [...]. (Berkeley, 1996, pp. 90-91)

Malebranche (1980, p. 89) on his side, proposes a conjectural conception of the existence of other minds:

Clearly we know them only through conjecture. At present we do not know them either in themselves or through their ideas, and as they are different from ourselves, we cannot know them through consciousness. We conjecture that the souls of other men are of the same sort as our own.

pseudonym intends to denounce what he calls “the realm of solipsists”. A circumstantial element of explanation can be given: if one admits that solipsism is conceivable under its own terms and can be overcome only through recognition of the existence of a creator, it can then seem pertinent, independent of experience, to suspect that others either do not recognize the existence of a creator or do not live according to what this recognition is assumed to imply. In this case, it would then seem required and pertinent to anonymously denounce solipsism.

However, in overcoming solipsism via proving the existence of a unique creator, the existence of the world seems to depend on arbitrariness. How could one then exclude that things are at their worst? Is there no reason that one is not alone in the world?

I can then attempt to show that solipsism can be overcome by starting from the world as a whole: it is not simply the idea of the creator that I can discover as proof that I am not alone in the world. If there is any proof of his existence, one must be the existence of the world in all its contingency. The reason I am not alone in the world is that the creator could not have arbitrarily realized any possible world: his perfection implies that he has realized the best possible world. One can thus recognize the necessity of a pre-established harmony between those who may represent the world to themselves and their representations. Monads are without doors or windows, but I cannot be the only person that there is. The sufficient reason for this choice by the creator is to be found in the internal “convenience” of worlds (Leibniz, 1989, p. 54). This is nothing but a question of point of view. If the representations that we have of each other agree with each other, it is due to the establishment of their harmony by the creator.

However, I can still interrogate myself: is it possible to prove in this way that I am not alone in the world? On the one hand, I have to admit that it would *a priori* be possible for me not to occupy any place in the world. On the other hand, to surmount the problem of the gratuitous affirmation of solitude in this way involves my ability to prove the existence of the creator. Is this not a dead end, insofar as the question of the existence of the creator belongs to faith rather than science? Can I not answer the issue raised by solipsism without making the first depend on the latter?

## The Question of the Legitimacy of Solipsism

Kant suggests that it is conceivable to put metaphysics back on the secure path of science by means of a critique. If I mention Kant, it is first insofar as he contributes to the history of scepticism in the *First Critique* and questions the legitimacy of solipsism in the *Second Critique*. In what follows, I outline the way in which he addresses a sceptical problematic in the *First Critique* and solipsism in the *Second Critique*, as this will help showing the background against which both Sartre and Wittgenstein received the question of solipsism.

On Kant's approach, one can provide to oneself the means to judge the controversies among those who enter the arena of metaphysics (*Kampfplatz*). That I can think that I am alone in the world already involves that I can think that I can occupy a place. I cannot simply establish *a posteriori* that I occupy one, as mistakes are conceivable with respect to what experience can deliver to me. Nevertheless, if I can commit mistakes with respect to experience, even ones that concern my occupation of a place in particular, then I can represent to myself that something occupies a place in space. Yet, while I can represent to myself an empty space, I cannot represent to myself an object without a space (Kant, 1998, pp. 157; A24-B38). Space, as a condition of possibility of any representation I can have of an object, does not come from experience. It is, along with time, a necessary *a priori* representation and thus belongs to the conditions of possibility of the intuition of objects. The difficulty stemmed from that one presenting oneself to nature "like a pupil" instead of "an appointed judge who compels witnesses to answer the questions he puts to them" (Kant, 1998, p. 109; BXIII). By means of reflexion on the conditions of possibility of knowledge, one can thus avoid a double difficulty: "without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (Kant, 1998, pp. 193-194; A51-B75). In this sense, a transcendental logic can be implemented which could apply, by comparison with general logic, to the form of thinking in its relation to the object (Kant, 1998, pp. 195-196; A55-B80).

*A priori* doubt with respect to one's own existence, which makes it seemingly necessarily to prove the existence of a unique creator, can be left aside: "the I think must be able to accompany all my representations" (Kant, 1998, p. 246; B131). *Material* idealism, understood as "the theory that declares the

existence of objects in space outside us either to be either merely doubtful and indemonstrable or else false and impossible” (Kant, 1998, p. 326; B274), can be refuted. To be conscious of one’s own existence suffices to prove the existence of objects in space outside me (Kant, 1998, p. 327; B275). In Kant’s own words, if one considers the “Refutation of Idealism”, then “one will realize that in the preceding proof the game that idealism plays has with greater justice been turned against it” (Kant, 1998, p. 327; B276). By means of this proof, Kant (1998, p. 326; B275) explicitly targets Descartes’ conception of the distinction between the inner and the outer. Conant (2012, p. 46) suggests that “Kant wants to show that without what the idealist wants to infer *to* there would be nothing to infer *from*”. In his reading of Kant’s approach, which I follow here, the argument of the “Refutation of Idealism” presupposes the results of the Transcendental Analytic (ibid.). Indeed, on this reading, the aim of the Transcendental Analytic is to cast and dispel a paradox. This paradox is tied to the previously mentioned sceptical problematic addressed by Descartes regarding “how to distinguish between dreaming that one is experiencing something and actually experiencing it?” To answer this requires, on Kant’s approach, answering another, more radical, sceptical problematic: “what does it take to be able to *dream* that one is experiencing something?” (Conant, 2012, p. 4). As evidence of such a problematic in Kant, Conant quotes the following passage from the second section of the *Deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding*, which precedes the “Refutation of Idealism”:

The *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same time conditions of the possibility of objects of experience. Now I maintain that the categories [...] are nothing but the conditions of thought in a possible experience [...] [A]nd without such unity [...] no thoroughgoing, universal, and therefore necessary, unity of consciousness would be met with in the manifold of perceptions. These perceptions would not then belong to any experience, consequently would be without an object, merely a blind play of representations, less even than a dream. (1998, pp. 234-235; A111) (Kant, 1998, A111)

Inasmuch as the “Refutation of Idealism” is aimed at the Cartesian problematic of scepticism, Kant’s treatment of it presupposes his own treatment of the sceptical problematic (Conant, 2012, p. 46). On Kant’s approach, the “Refutation of Idealism” would remain ungrounded if the means to provide the refutation had not previously been deduced. If it is not established that we have those means *a priori*, then the proof could not suffice to turn the game of idealism against itself. Conant suggests that the decisive step of the Transcendental

Deduction that enables Kant to address a sceptical problematic “lies in showing that a play of representations, for it to have an objective purport, must be in accord with the unity that the categories prescribe” (ibid.). The conception of harmony in Kant’s approach is distinct from that of Leibniz, which I mentioned in the preceding section. As we shall see, the former counts the latter as one of its targets. While Leibniz proposes a conception of pre-established harmony between those who represent the world to themselves and their representations, Kant seeks to account for a harmony that holds between representations and reality in order to show that the grounds of knowledge are secured *a priori* and thereby to legitimize the structuring concepts of a discursive understanding.

What distinguishes the transcendental approach from the earlier one is that it dispenses with the prejudice of a restriction internal to human reason, which would condemn it to unavoidable ignorance: “a question about the constitution of this something, which cannot be thought through any determinate predicate because it is posited entirely outside the sphere of objects that can be given to us – is entirely nugatory and empty” (Kant, 1998, pp. 505; A479-B507). Even the “absolute whole” of all phenomena taken together would not involve any uncertainty whatsoever with respect to knowledge:

[F]or your object is merely in your brain and cannot be given at all outside it; hence all you have to worry about is agreeing with yourself, and avoiding the amphiboly that would make your idea into a putative representation of something given empirically and thus of an object to be cognized in accordance with the laws of experience. (Kant, 1998, pp. 507; A484-B512)

In this sense, one can introduce the principle of thoroughgoing determination. This involves “a transcendental substratum, which contains as it were the entire storehouse of material from which all possible predicates of things can be taken” (Kant, 1998, pp. 555; A576-B604). But the whole of all predicates required to determine an object by comparison with the whole is obviously not given prior to experience. The transcendental substrate or idea of a whole of reality (*omnitudo realitatis*) involved in this principle thus needs to be distinguished from its hypostasis: the idea of a most real being (*ens realissimum*) (Kant, 1998, pp. 555-557; A578-B606). Conceiving the idea of reality as a whole requires nothing but the *possibility* of obtaining all predicates in order to show that realities can in principle be determined without exception. By contrast, conceiving the most real being would require the givenness of all predicates.

Kant's (1998, pp. 558; A580 - B608) criticism of the presumption to conceive a being corresponding to the concept of all reality is radical: "[Such a thing] is a mere fiction, through which we encompass and realize the manifold of our idea in an ideal, as a particular being; for this we have no warrant, nor even for directly assuming the possibility of such a hypothesis". Kant (1998, pp. 559; A582-B610) also proposes an account for the origin of this fiction in the surreptitious taking of the distributive unity of the empirical employment of the understanding as the collective unity of experience as a whole. Accordingly, if it is granted that the principle of thoroughgoing determination does not involve any existence claim, it can be understood as stating that every thing can be located within a unique space of real possibilities or logical space. Thus one can know that there is an external world independently of proof of the existence of a unique creator. On the contrary, such proof cannot be provided. This does not require renouncing the idea of God. But it does amount to distinguishing a dogmatic form of anthropocentrism from its symbolic form. Kant develops this distinction in the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Here, he says that if properties are not taken to be ascribed to "the unknown", we can understand the idea of a supreme being standing in the same relation to the world as an artisan to a watch, a ship to a builder or a commander to a regiment (Kant, 2004, pp. 108; §57-4:357). Thus, such a being would not be cognized as it is in itself, but "only according to what it is for me, that is, with respect to the world of which I am a part" (ibid.). This is "cognition according to analogy" (ibid.).

By the time of the *Second Critique*, Kant confronts the difficulties raised by selfishness, characterized as solipsism, independently of a theological condemnation. He characterizes solipsism as an attitude which would authorize self-love, regardless of its conformity to moral law (Kant, 2002, p. 96; §73). Thus, it would constitute a form of unreasonable self-love. Practically speaking, the solipsist would act in order to satisfy all of his inclinations, aiming to realize his happiness as a whole, irrespective of the conformity of his attitude to the moral law. The solipsist would act as if he were exempt from following moral law.

However, is one not now in an untenable situation? If it is *a priori* established that it is inconceivable for me not to have occupied a place in space in space, it nevertheless remains *a posteriori* true that I can deceive or delude myself with respect to the world that I represent to myself. Is this not the final clue that I

can realize that the cognizing subject is *a priori* constrained to his representations without conceivably being able to remedy such a situation?

Schopenhauer (2010, p. 3) draws this conclusion. He suggests considering the proposition “the world is my representation” as the first maximally general *a priori* valid truth with respect to any living and knowing being. One has first attempted to prove the falsity of solipsism and then its illegitimacy. But from what position could this proof come if not from the one described as impossible? In this case, it is not solipsism but theoretical egoism that one would need to reject, a position that would consist of pretending to be able to adopt exclusively, not the point of view of an instance, but the theoretical point of view of the unique knowing subject. In this sense, admitting that we could adopt the point of view of a judge, external as much to life as to a dream, would amount to renouncing any distinction between them. To distinguish them involves doing it from the inside. The “ancient wisdom” according to which life is but an extended dream would then be the only remaining basis for marking their distinction (Schopenhauer, 2010, p. 40). In order to realize this, one would need to start from the unique reflexive point of view of the cognizing subject. Indeed, even if the world is reduced to my representation, it nevertheless remains certain that my representations deliver to me content that I can consider by means of reflexion: an eye sees the sun, a hand feels the earth (Schopenhauer, 2010, p. 3). The extent of my certainties would then coincide with the knowledge acquired by reflexion upon what my senses deliver. In the first person, my body would be the evidence that would suffice for me to prove to myself that external things exist. As an individual, I must have had to be able to encounter this body that is mine in the world as an object among others (Schopenhauer, 2010, p. 124; 199). As an instance of the unique knowing subject, it is my body that furnishes the starting point from which the understanding can reach the world. I am thus conscious of myself in a twofold manner, either as a will or as a representation: “the will is *a priori* cognition of the body, and the body is *a posteriori* cognition of the will” (Schopenhauer, 2010, p. 125). This would also apply exactly to the world (Schopenhauer, 2010, p. 40). Thus, the only remaining task for philosophers would be to recapitulate “the world” by means of abstract concepts. There would be the genius and “the ordinary person, a factory product of nature that is made each day by the thousand” (Schopenhauer, 2010, p. 210).

### The Question of the Intelligibility of Solipsism

In the accounts described here, solipsism has been assumed as a preliminary in order to ground knowledge. This amounts to granting the conceivability of doubting the reality of the external world, and thereby other minds, in order to dispel this same doubt. However, the difficulty involved in granting such doubt with respect to the external world is that nothing seems to be able to dispel it with respect to other minds. The reality of the external world has been taken as shown via diverse proofs of the existence of a unique creator or as assured on the basis of transcendental deduction. By contrast, nothing seems able to prove the existence of other minds. On the one hand, nothing seems to count as an *a posteriori* proof of the existence of others, since such doubt cannot be based on experience. On the other hand, proof that would dispel this doubt cannot be produced *a priori* as the generalized absence of others is conceivable *a posteriori*. A counterfactual scenario that comes close to this, where someone could envisage being the only one who remains, can be envisaged. Some philosophers, such as Nietzsche and C. I. Lewis, have imagined this counterfactual scenario in order to suggest that assuming its relevance implies the devaluation of the present.

However, does this imply that it could and should be granted to solipsism that one can establish that one is essentially alone in the world? As Russell suggested in *The Problems of Philosophy* in 1912, before both the *Tractatus* and *Being and Nothingness*, the solipsist hypothesis, at first sight, is characterized by its gratuitousness: “it may be that the whole outer world is nothing but a dream, and that we alone exist. This is an uncomfortable possibility; but although it cannot be strictly proved to be false, there is not the slightest reason to suppose that it is true” (Russell, 2011, p. 14). This formulation testifies to the way in which, at least until the beginning of the twentieth century, solipsism was conceived: it both raised an issue central to philosophy, namely that of the foundations of knowledge, and it was assumed as an ineluctable preliminary in order to solve this issue.

Rather than the philosophical problem of grounding knowledge, both Sartre and Wittgenstein question the intelligibility of solipsism: i.e., whether and to what extent solipsism is a truth. The present thesis does not assume that there is an alternative way of grounding knowledge to be searched for once the threat

of solipsism has been dispelled. Rather, if it can be shown that solipsism could not be possibility, in the sense that it could not belong to someone's situated space of possibilities, and thus that it could not threaten knowledge to begin with, then the very appeal of relying on solipsism as a method to attempt to positively establish the grounded character of knowledge can be dispensed with. To do so, it is useful to consider the way in which the relation between the problem of the existence of the external world and the problem of the existence of others has traditionally been conceived. It is, I suggest, this relation that both Sartre and Wittgenstein invite us to question.

If one admits that it is conceivable to doubt the reality of the external world as a whole and thereby of the existence of others, it seems conceivable to discover one's solitude independently from experience. To the extent that one admits that it could be either possible or impossible for one to "notice" one's existence independently from the external world, it seems equally conceivable to succeed or fail to "discover" one's isolation. On the same move, one admits that it could be possible for us to have only representations of each other. Insofar as there is no conceivable proof of the existence of others, it seems necessary to admit that we can be certain that there really is an external world, while still only having representations of each other. Grounding knowledge can then seem necessary. The question of the existence of others arises only then, because it seems that if we can disagree on the existence of the world, that we need insurance in this respect, then nothing prevents us from considering that others could be absent as well.

However, is such a scenario decisive in any sense? To what extent can it be assumed? Could one ever discover that one is essentially alone in the world? One surely can occasionally feel alone. And one can pronounce or write the words "I am essentially alone in the world" and "I am the only one who exists". We encounter such affirmations in fiction. But were a question of this style encountered elsewhere on another occasion, one could wonder about what their utterer meant. Against the background of one's questioning whether he or she is essentially alone, the words "I am alone in the world" or "I alone exist" could seem to express a metaphysical discovery. Yet this question is at odds with the possibility of situating oneself in light of particular circumstances.

For, if it had to be granted that someone could mean such question in a way which would be meant to call into question the existence of others, then the

answer would be, as Russell suggests, gratuitous. So, how to address the tension which the tension between the question “am I essentially all alone in the world?”, which can at least seem to beg an answer, and the gratuitousness of the answers meant to answer it?

There are at least two manners of addressing this tension. The first is to admit that the problem is only theoretical, in order to establish that it is a pseudo-problem. This is, I suggest, Sartre’s approach in *Being and Nothingness*. The peculiarity of the resolution of the theoretical problem of the existence of others that he proposes is that it is not meant to prove or establish the existence of others. On the contrary, it is intended to render explicit our certainty of the existence of others and thereby to retrospectively bring out the counterpart of remaining uncertain with respect to the theoretical problem of the existence of other minds. This is not the only achievement of Sartre with respect to the issue of solipsism in *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre seeks to establish that the ways in which the issue of solipsism are traditionally posed are enmeshed in various difficulties, including the undue privileging of external relations and the primacy of knowledge, as brought out by Morris (2008, pp. 43-46; 48-50). By the primacy of knowledge, I here mean the requirement that reflexive consciousness could and should unconditionally precede consciousness.<sup>3</sup> By the undue privileging of external relations, I mean taking external relations (i.e., those whose relata subsist independently, as, for example, flowers in a vase) as necessarily prevailing over internal relations (i.e., those whose relata are not meant to subsist independently, for example, consciousness and body) in order to account for the intelligibility of action.<sup>4</sup> In this introduction, I just underscore that Sartre’s primary concern is with rendering explicit certainty of the existence of others, because he purports to provide a conceptual means to address the asymmetry between the certainty of an individual with respect to his or her own existence, and that he or she has of others, which is explicit in approaches such as that of Berkeley and Malebranche. On Sartre’s approach, one can show how the affirmation of the existence of others is not gratuitous, inasmuch as there are contexts where it is called into question. It would thus be anyone’s responsibility to affirm its pertinence in circumstances where the existence of others is called into question.

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<sup>3</sup> I account for Sartre’s criticism of the privileging of external relations in section 2.1.

<sup>4</sup> I account for Sartre’s criticism of the primacy of knowledge in section 1.2.2.

Another approach to the issue of solipsism is to show that the theoretical problem can be dissolved by providing means to settle the question, that is, by showing that there is no such thing as a theoretical problem of the existence of others. This is the reading I propose of Wittgenstein's approach in the *Tractatus*. To suggest that one cannot say what solipsism means, although it is entirely correct, would be an invitation to consider the outcome of not assessing what our affirmations mean or of attempting to disprove an unassessed affirmation. Could one not effectively find oneself showing the contrary of what one thinks one is saying, while saying the contrary of what one thinks one is showing with the words "I am essentially alone in the world", "only I exist", or "there is only me"? Could someone else not effectively reproduce the difficulty by attempting to disprove the one who affirms these statements? In this approach, it could be helpful not to exclude either solipsism, or that the solipsist could exclude him or herself, almost in an unbeknownst way, from the space of his or her own possibilities. It could be superfluous, pace Frege and Russell, to try to exclude solipsism: quite the contrary if we do not mean to exclude anyone. This does not imply making an undue concession to solipsism. In the present thesis, I attempt to show that the core of truth in solipsism best appears if considered in its fluctuating opposition to the traditional conception of the *a priori*. As Floyd (1998, pp. 81-83) suggests:

The *Tractatus* is a deeply reflective rejection of the traditional *a priori*, every one of philosophy's attempts to lay down necessary conditions for thinking and for speaking. But Wittgenstein does not pursue the self-undermining project of trying to frame *a priori* arguments against the possibility of *a priori* knowledge; thinking and understanding are not to be pinned down by any investigation of logic, meaning, or the world, even Wittgenstein's own. [...] The book is a deeply reflective rejection of every one of philosophy's attempts to lay down *a priori* or necessary conditions for living. [...] Solipsism is one of the most persistent refuges of the *a priori*, a limiting attempt to impose a limit upon thinking and living.

In the reading I propose, the very need that Kant wished to satisfy for grounding knowledge is called into question by Wittgenstein. This does not imply that Wittgenstein considered knowledge to be ungrounded, or that he disagreed with Kant under every description. Wittgenstein agrees with Kant when he writes in the first person that "every thing is, as it were, in a space of possible [states of affairs]. I can think of this space as empty, but not of the thing without the space" (translation modified, TLP, 2.013). But Wittgenstein rejects that we could evaluate *a priori* the truth of propositions. He suggests that wishing to delimit *a priori* the

sense of propositions lead us to nonsense (TLP, 5.5571). But how should we understand this rejection, and how does Wittgenstein avoid what Floyd calls “the self-undermining project of trying to frame *a priori* arguments against the possibility of *a priori* knowledge” (Floyd, 1998, p. 81)?

A distinction introduced by Lewis (1929, p. 196) between two senses of “necessary” can be helpful here: “‘Necessary’ is an ambiguous word; its contradictory is, in one meaning, ‘contingent,’ in another ‘voluntary’”. Lewis himself argues for a new conception of the *a priori* according to which its necessity consists in “its character as a legislative act” which represents “a constraint imposed by the mind” (Lewis, 1929, p. 197). He designed his own conception of the *a priori* against conceptions which equate necessity with involuntary compliance, and, furthermore, he advocated a conception of *a priori* truth based on the legislative character of definitions. That the conception of necessity as an *a priori* sort of involuntary compliance targeted by Lewis belongs to Wittgenstein’s targets in the *Tractatus* is plain: “A necessity for one thing to happen because another has happened does not exist. There is only *logical* necessity” (TLP, 6.37). However, Wittgenstein further adds: “At the basis of the whole modern view of the world lies the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena” (TLP, 6.371). What he questions is, I suggest, not only the conception of necessity as involuntary compliance, but also the motives for needing to reply to the alleged defects of such a view on the basis of *a priori* conceptions of voluntary compliance. Arguably, the notion which generates this difficulty is the one of “laws of nature”: the idiom makes it look as if natural regularities could and would need to be transgressed. That is to say, Wittgenstein questions the status of the personification of nature in philosophical argumentation. I will try to show that Wittgenstein underscores that solipsism contains a core of truth in its opposition to traditional conceptions of the *a priori*, arguably manifest in the unrestricted contingency of the visible and the describable. I follow Sullivan’s suggestion that Kant’s attempt to legitimize the structuring concepts of a discursive understanding implies construing the limits of the world as limitations (2013, p. 258) and that, in response, Wittgenstein denies the need for any restrictive or contrastive limitation: “Only so can the self of solipsism shrink to an extensionless point, leaving the whole of reality coordinate with it. [...] [W]hatever room Wittgenstein wanted to make for faith cannot have been anything like the room Kant intended” (2013, p. 265). There is a rupture in

the way Wittgenstein addresses the issue of solipsism in comparison with Kant. If wishing to delimit *a priori* the sense of propositions lead us to nonsense (TLP, 5.5571), it would then not only be *a priori* inconceivable not to occupy any place in space, but also inconceivable to discover oneself *a posteriori* as missing from the register of conceivable discoveries. Furthermore, if it is not necessary to admit that someone could have been missing from the register of conceivable discoveries, and that the available means to express that someone occupies a space could not come from oneself, then there never has been an unsurmountable solitude which could be expressed linguistically in the first place. In this approach, the *Tractatus* does not attempt to exclude any manner of answering an epistemological problem raised by solipsism. Rather, it establishes that it suffices to show that strictures imposed on the expressions of our thought unavoidably manifest themselves as such. In this approach, if falls to solipsism to establish how it does not amount to an attempt to impose stricture on the expression of our thoughts.

It is therefore enough to address the issue of solipsism through both Sartre and Wittgenstein. Not only do they share the philosophical background outlined previously, but both show that one cannot discover one's essential loneliness or informatively remark one's existence. This is not to say that one cannot realize that one is alone or that one cannot feel alone. The goal, rather, is to dissipate the fiction of a confinement that could not be overcome.

In the present thesis, I suggest their approaches should be distinguished in the following manner. Sartre suggests that the pitfall or "reef" of solipsism can be avoided and that absence of an answer to the metaphysical question "why are there other consciousnesses?" can be taken as an answer to the philosophical problem of the existence of others: "so it is" (BN, 325). Sartre does not, thereby, mean to reach a restrictive verdict about human nature. Nevertheless, Sartre stages attempts to construe the limits of language as limitations at various stages in order to develop a concept of finitude which is adequate to distinguish internal from external finitude. That is to say, Sartre seeks to introduce a distinction between a concept of external finitude which implies that the construal of the limits of language as limitations cannot be achieved and a concept of internal finitude which does not imply such construal in order to argue for the superfluity and misleadingness of the former. Wittgenstein, on his side, does not construe

the limits of language as limitations in the *Tractatus*. There, the issue raised by solipsism in philosophy is shown to be the construal of the limits of language as limitations. Wittgenstein seeks to render clear the importance of not excluding the core of truth in solipsism, which cannot be excluded without *eo ipso* being rendered manifest.

I earlier suggested that the modern problem of the existence of other minds stems from the manner in which the problem of the reality of the external world has been treated. To interrogate oneself on the *a priori* conditions bearing on representational activity sufficed to exclude that it could be impossible to acquire objective knowledge from the external world. But the privilege granted to the question of grounding knowledge that one can acquire of phenomena has had for a counterpart to accredit the idea that it could always be *a posteriori* possible to pertinently conceive the generalized absence of others. The question of the existence of other minds collapses into the question of the reality of the external world. It has consequently been assumed that these problems are identical (except with respect to one categorical difference). Against this background, the problems of the reality of the external world and that of other minds are rooted, I suggest, in a single way of accounting for the relation of the world to thought. It seems that if it cannot be shown that the external world is real, then thinking about it could be an illusion. Similarly, it seems that if it cannot be shown that there are other minds, then thinking about them could be an illusion. In both cases, the requisite of existence is granted: if what I can think about does not exist first as a representation, I could not even think about it. The representation which was meant to assure, by introducing an objective mediation, the knowledge we acquire from objects seems finally in the case of other minds to constitute that which could render their existence uncertain. This uncertainty could in turn testify to the private character of the decision that ought to be taken with respect to the words: saying "I am the only one there could be" or "I am essentially alone in the world".

Sartre's and Wittgenstein's approaches converge insofar as they proceed from inside the limits of sense in order as much to dissipate the illusion of an undetectable confinement as the one of the restriction of the thinkable that is its corollary. They do not attempt to delimit and thereby ground *a priori* the possibility of knowledge of objects, but rather to render explicit some conditions of the intelligibility of expression and action. For both, it can be shown that there

is no such thing as generalized doubt about the world and other minds. Furthermore, for both, that which cannot and need not be done to do so is the construal of the limits of language for sake of legitimation. A counterfactual scenario that comes close to solipsism, according to which one could be the only remaining being, can surely be imagined; nevertheless, this does not render it relevant. To consider such a scenario could even put into relief that to exclude our certainty about having been in contact with others, as implied by solipsism is arbitrary. Does the very formulation of the fiction of a doubt about the existence of others not imply the appropriation of language? I will suggest that it is not necessary, and furthermore misleading, to grant that an essential sort of solitude could be the object of a discovery. I will use these last terms of criticism recurrently throughout the present thesis when talking about a specific philosophical move: namely, the construal of the limits of language as limitations, which, as suggested previously, is central to the ways in which Sartre and Wittgenstein address the issue of solipsism. By using these terms I suggest that the limits of language cannot and need not be construed as limitations. As Wittgenstein (1993, p. 185) suggests:

Language contains the same traps for everyone; the immense network of well-kept // passable // false paths. And thus we see one person after another walking the same paths and we know already where he will make a turn, where he will keep on going straight ahead without noticing the turn, etc., etc. Therefore wherever false paths branch off I should put up signs which help one get by the dangerous places.

I assume that authors who proposed resolute readings of Wittgenstein, but also authors such as Sullivan who question resolute readings, have helped many of us to recognize some of these false paths. I also assume that the activity of putting up signs to help others pass false paths presents a therapeutic dimension. I assume that Read has contributed to making this clear in the works of Wittgenstein, as has Morris in relation to Sartre. In this thesis, I focus on clarifying the signs put both by Sartre and Wittgenstein concerning solipsism.

The present thesis is divided into four chapters. In the first, I try to establish that Sartre and Wittgenstein locate the difficulty raised by solipsism at the intersection of transcendental solipsism and metaphysical realism. The aim of this is to establish that solipsism manifests itself through the pretence to take an exclusive perspective on the world: i.e., a perspective that could own and be owned by one and only one individual. The second chapter focuses on Sartre's treatment of the issue of solipsism. The aim of this is to establish that, in Sartre's

approach, the theoretical problem of the existence of others is a pseudo-problem. The third chapter focuses on Wittgenstein's treatment of the issue of solipsism. The aim of this is to establish that Wittgenstein proposes a way to settle the issue of solipsism. The fourth chapter focuses on two objections to Sartre's and Wittgenstein's treatments of the issue of solipsism. The aim of this is to show that Sartre and Wittgenstein establish both the superfluity and the misleading nature of the ideas of self-discovery (i.e., a discovery that is essentially made by and essentially makes one and only one individual) and self-inheritance (i.e., an inheritance that is essentially given and received by one and only one individual) that are implied by solipsism.

## 1. The Issue of Solipsism

The aim of this chapter is to establish that solipsism, the doctrine according to which “I am the only one there could be”, presupposes that an individual could take an exclusive perspective on the world as a whole. An “exclusive perspective” on the world, as I use this phrase, means a perspective that (1) is necessarily occupied by its occupant (it cannot be taken by another occupant); and that (2) its occupant necessarily occupies (its occupant cannot take up another perspective). Thus, an “exclusive perspective”, in this use, at once (2) essentially owns its occupant; and (1) is essentially owned by that very same occupant. From such a perspective, the solipsist could as much expose as impose limitations applying to all other individuals. To admit that he could do so would require admitting that, although he would not be confined to his representations, we would be confined to ours, inasmuch as we would be reduced to being representations of the only mind that there could be.

When we usually use “perspective”, we do not need to mention that a perspective is not meant to depend on someone at the exclusion of someone else. Indeed, someone can produce a drawing of how an object or a room would look from a different perspective, as an artist or an architect can, without having ever occupied this perspective. In such cases, *anyone* who occupied this perspective would also perceive the object or the room or the landscape under the same (visual) modality. The concept of perspective developed and involved in the practice of the artists of the Renaissance implies that any individual could take any conceivable perspective on any object or room or landscape. This concept of perspective involves abstraction and imagination, inasmuch as an artist who produces a drawing of an object or a room from a perspective he did not occupy needs to *project* how the object or the room would look from a different position. We do *not* ordinarily need to do this in order to perceive our surroundings. However, if we attempt to account for our standpoints in a similar manner in order to account for the public character of language and knowledge (e.g., Russell, 2011, p. 17), then we tend to reach some difficulties: it can seem, for example, necessary to grant that two individuals cannot simultaneously occupy the same perspective, as if two distinct standpoints of the individuals had to be secured.

The notion of an “exclusive perspective”, as I use it, is designed to disentangle such difficulties, which are confronted by both by Sartre and Wittgenstein.

I will argue in section 1.1. that Sartre and Wittgenstein agree on situating the solipsist doctrine at the intersection of (transcendental) idealism and (metaphysical) realism. Indeed, that an individual can suppose he is the only one there could be, from an exclusive perspective on the world as a whole, presupposes admitting that one could take an exclusive perspective on the world as a whole. Transcendental idealism is the approach according to which several individuals can take an exclusive perspective on the world. Facing the solipsist threat, one could then be tempted to admit that it would be impossible for all of us to take an exclusive perspective on the world as a whole. Metaphysical realism is the approach according to which it is impossible for everyone to take an exclusive perspective on the world as a whole. Such an approach to realism, confronted both by Sartre and Wittgenstein, is explicitly committed to our eventual confinement to our representations of reality. This immediately raises the question of whether such realism suffices to ratify *a posteriori* our respective confinement to representations.

I will confront this question in section 1.2. by arguing that Sartre and Wittgenstein agree on a diagnosis according to which the three doctrines (transcendental idealism, solipsism and metaphysical realism) are to be rejected, insofar as they all presuppose that an exclusive perspective could be taken on the world as a whole. To presuppose that one could take such a perspective implies a misleading analogy, i.e., the comparison of the relation of the eye to the visual field with the relation of an individual to the world. However, admitting that an individual can take an exclusive perspective on the world presupposes admitting that the visual field could be assimilated to a perspective. The difficulty here is that one would need to have seen oneself from an outer perspective on the world in order to establish that the visual field could be reduced to a perspective. From this perspective, nothing would distinguish seeing someone from seeing an object. In the final part of the present chapter, I will question this aspect of solipsism. To ratify our respective confinement to representations *a posteriori* would imply that there could be a perspective from which someone could not be distinguished from something. Is this conceivable at all?

## 1.1. Idealism, Solipsism and Realism

In this section, I argue that Sartre and Wittgenstein agree on situating the solipsist doctrine at the intersection of (transcendental) idealism and (metaphysical) realism. I argue in section 1.1.1. that, in Sartre's approach, solipsism presupposes the possibility of discovering oneself from an impersonal perspective which would be incompatible with first-person judgement. Solipsism can thus be characterized as an inchoate attempt to dispense with the concept of the other in order to account for the constitution of experience. In section 1.1.2., I argue that, in Wittgenstein's approach, solipsism presupposes that my character is expressed only in the constitution of my body or brain. Solipsism can thus be characterized as an inchoate attempt to distinguish oneself from all other humans by presupposing that one can infer one's character from one's physiognomy. Finally, in section 1.1.3. I argue that, for Sartre and Wittgenstein, solipsism can be characterized as the rejection by an individual of a collective epistemic privilege (i.e., infallible access to one's representations) in order to claim a private epistemic privilege. The solipsist thereby claims that only he can infallibly access his representations.

### 1.1.1. The Reef of Solipsism

The section of *Being and Nothingness* entitled "The Reef of Solipsism" begins by stressing the awkwardness of the problem of the existence of others according to metaphysical realism (BN, 247). According to the form of metaphysical realism target by Sartre, acknowledging the reality of the external world (i.e., the whole of what there is) suffices in order to assure the reality of others. Another mind could be understood as "a thinking substance, who may not vanish into secondary and primary qualities and whose essential structures I would find in me" (BN, 247). Sartre diagnoses such conceptions as stemming from an attempt "to account for knowledge through an action of world on the thinking substance" (BN, 247). If the dimension of passivity involved in perception is taken to require a substantial counterpart, the world is conceived as a medium through which separated "thinking substances" have to pass in order to communicate:

The soul of the other is thus separated from mine by the whole distance which separates first my soul from my body, then my body from an other's body, finally an other's body from his soul. (BN, 247)

On the basis of this approach, one can be certain that a spatio-temporal “thing” is immediately present to one “in person”. Nevertheless, one could not obtain similar certainty with respect to the soul of someone else: “this soul does not give itself in person to mine. It is an absence, a meaning; the body points to it without delivering it” (BN, 247). Although, as a philosophical doctrine, realism is based on intuition, there would be no such thing as intuiting someone else. The only clue given through intuition of the mediate presence of another mind would be an impersonal intuition of a body: “it is not someone else’s *body* which is present to the realist intuition but *a body*” (BN, 248).

Sartre diagnoses theories which assume such an approach to be adequate as follows. The realist and positivist psychology of the nineteenth century, the theories of empathy, sympathy, forms (in Gestalt psychology) and behaviourism, all assume the conjectural or hypothetical character of the existence of others (BN, 248-249). The existence of one’s fellow is taken to be intelligible as a thing or object. Accordingly, the only thing that would require an explanation would be the *manner* in which one could make such hypotheses and “decipher on the body of others the shades of a consciousness which is alien to mine” (BN, 248). Consequently, such theories depend on an oscillating recourse to either analogy or experience in order to explain in probable terms that one can only conjecture about other minds without knowing them.

The analogical approach can be characterized as follows: one can know only in conjectural terms (or solely in terms of probabilities) what is done and meant by someone else through a comparison with “oneself”. Insofar as I assume that others would probably conceive themselves in the same way that I do, I can only make conjectures about other minds. The difficulty raised by such an approach is that our knowledge of others would only be probable. For example, the sudden coloration of a face could be interpreted as anger, for I would “know” that this is what I do in similar circumstances (*ibid.*). So the analogical approach admits, on its own terms, either to be grounded in or grounding only conjectural or uncertain knowledge about others. While the existence of others is certain, one’s knowledge of them would only be conjectural (*ibid.*). Sartre suggests that this affirmation is a sophism, one, as we shall see, used by behaviourism, for it consists in mere affirmation that the knowledge of other minds is conjectural.

Thus, realism lapses into idealism when confronted with the theoretical question of the existence of other minds. Insofar as the reality of the external

world has been *posited*, everything is as if the knowledge of other minds could, by contrast, be out of reach. To this extent, such realism cannot confront the difficulty raised by solipsism. However, if such realism thus indexes the very use of “we” to idealism, would it not be better to start from the critical idealist perspective (*ibid.*)?

Sartre suggests that, just as with the realist perspective, the (transcendental) idealist alternative cannot solve the theoretical question of the existence of other minds. In an idealist approach, one can only obtain representations of others, to the extent that someone else could abstractly be assimilated to one’s representation (BN, 249). One could investigate one’s representations of others from within a system which reduces all objects to a linked group of representations (*ibid.*). It would then be certain that I can represent someone else to myself as being given as an object of my experience. Nevertheless, the central difficulty raised by such an approach is that, to the extent that I must posit the other as a subject to whom I am an object of experience, it seems that I cannot conceive his real relation to me.

This difficulty does not stem from the assimilation of the problem of the existence of other minds to the one of noumenal realities (BN, 249). On the idealist approach, anyone can pose to themselves the question of their noumenal existence. However, its opposite is that when I focus on someone else in everyday experience, they are nothing but a phenomenon which points to other phenomena. For example, someone’s anger towards me would be a phenomenon which points to “a series of thoughts which appear to one as phenomena of my intimate sense” (BN, 250). Someone else’s anger would not be available to my apperception and would point to an organizing activity which exceeds my experience in the first person. These phenomena would belong to a system which I could not access.

Furthermore, insofar as it is a condition of the possibility of any experience that “the subject” organizes one’s impressions in a connected system, another mind cannot appear to one as organizing one’s experience without contradiction: “the phenomenon would be over-determined” (BN, 250). Considering causality cannot resolve the difficulty, for it can link phenomena and the experience of one subject at a time. If we consider anew the example of anger, one’s perception of someone else’s anger (e.g., witnessing a furious expression) and the anger felt by someone else would be two externally related

phenomena. If I grant that causality could bridge the gap between two radically separated experiences, the difficulty would be resolved. But I cannot, because doing so would involve renouncing to the ideal nature of causality, which is meant to unify the phenomena of one and the same experience under the form of irreversibility.

Sartre underlines that, in Kant's approach, there is no such thing as a pre-established harmony which could pre-empt this difficulty (BN, 251). He nevertheless counterfactually considers whether such harmony would leave two distinct "times" unrelated anyway (each individual having its "own" time in such an approach): one at which someone else would feel anger; and another at which I would perceive the expression of that anger. This counterfactual indicates the impossibility of accounting for communication between consciousnesses in the idealist approach. The concept of others (*autrui*) or other minds would not contribute to the constitution of first-person experience, and thus it would need to be classified with teleological concepts among regulatory concepts: "[Others] therefore belong to the category of 'as if.' [Others are] an *a priori* hypothesis which does not have any other justification save the unity it permits to operate in our experience, a hypothesis which cannot be thought without contradiction" (translation modified, BN, 251).

Nevertheless, the concept of other minds is only regulatory on this approach, and, as underlined earlier, one's perception of someone else seems to be bounded: "[one's perception of another mind] points by principle to phenomena situated outside of any experience possible to me" (translation modified, BN, 251). Nevertheless, according to this approach, the concept of someone else is not reduced to a purely instrumental function. On the contrary, the intelligibility of someone else's autonomy is acknowledged: "categories of phenomena seem to exist only *for him*" (BN, 252). Nevertheless, the concept of other minds seems to function as a fixed frame of experience, a system of meanings and experiences which are radically distinct from mine. Everything is as if this fixed frame could be gradually filled in, inasmuch as my experience of someone else would provide me with concrete content, exactly as with concrete objects.

Nevertheless, with such an approach I can still aim, through my experience, to comprehend the feelings, ideas, will and character of others. I acknowledge that someone else can see me as I can see that person. Thus, the

concept of other minds cannot be a regulatory concept, but is rather implicitly assimilated to “the radical negation of my existence, for he is the one whom for I am not subject but object” (ibid.).

Idealism therefore does no more than realism to confront the difficulty posed by solipsism. From the idealist perspective, one is caught between conflicting demands with respect to the reality, objectivity and subjectivity of other minds (BN, 252-253). One may grant that someone else is real, yet the reality of someone else seems to remain inconceivable. One may grant that someone else can be construed as an object, yet one’s intuition of someone else seems not to be delivered in the same way as other objects. One may grant that someone else can be posited as a subject, yet it is solely as the object of one’s thought that someone else can be considered.

Sartre suggests at this stage that solipsism stems, to some extent, from idealism. Facing the previously considered difficulties, there would be only two solutions for the idealist: either to affirm the reality of others by positing “a real and extra-empirical communication between consciousnesses” (BN, 253); or “to entirely get rid of the concept of [the other] (*l’autre*) and prove that it is useless to the constitution of my experience” (translation modified, BN, 253). This second option is solipsism.

On the basis of this approach, solipsism should be distinguished from its gratuitous (i.e., neither justified nor caused) affirmation. To affirm one’s ontological solitude is a purely metaphysical hypothesis, unjustified and gratuitous (ibid.). It is not compatible with idealism, insofar as affirming that nothing exists outside me exceeds “the strict field of my experience” (ibid.). While this affirmation could eventually be understood as a symptom of solipsism, it should not be equated with it. Rather, Sartre suggests that it is characteristic of the solipsist solution not to be presented as such. That is to say, the impersonality involved in the mode of presentation of solipsism is not accidental:

But if [the solipsistic solution presents itself] more modestly as a refusal to leave the solid ground of experience and as a positive attempt not to make use of the concept of [an other mind], it is perfectly logical; it remains on the level of critical positivism, and although it is opposed to the deepest inclinations of our being, it derives its justification from the contradictions of the notion of [*others*] considered in the idealist perspective to provide its justification. (Translation modified, BN, 253)

Sartre provides an example of such a “perfectly logical” approach: the works of Watson, the self-ascribed “discoverer” of behaviourism. His initial criticism is that the pretence of producing an “exact” and “objective” psychology is tantamount to endorsing solipsism as a working (or methodological) hypothesis. Sartre confronts the assumption that knowing someone’s mind as one can know the properties of an object is intelligible.

Furthermore, Sartre uses Husserlian terms in order to further characterize the issue raised by this approach. The behaviourist approach does not involve denying the presence of objects that could be named “psychical beings” in someone’s field of experience. But it does involve practicing “a sort of *έποχή* bearing on the existence of representational systems organized by a subject and situated outside someone’s experience” (ibid.).<sup>5</sup> Importantly, when the “*έποχή*” is taken to operate in the first person, all judgments bearing upon spatio-temporal existence would be forbidden (Husserl, 1983, p. 61). This seems at least superficially similar, although diametrically opposed, to Watson’s (1998, p. 6) suggestion that, in order to formulate laws with respect to “those things” that may be observed, “we can observe *behavior – what the organism does or says*”. In both cases, everything is as if experience, and *a fortiori* others, could be described purely from an impersonal standpoint, which, in principle, would not be compatible with judgments made in the first person.

Sartre then suggests that, although Kant and the majority of post-Kantians affirm the existence of the other in order to oppose solipsism, they may only refer to common sense (*bon sens*) or to deeper tendencies in order to justify their affirmation:

We know that Schopenhauer speaks of the solipsist as “a madman shut up in an impregnable blockhaus”.<sup>6</sup> What a confession of impotence! It is

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<sup>5</sup> Sartre’s use of the Husserlian term “*έποχή*” to characterize Watson’s approach is unclear at this stage of *Being and Nothingness*. I will return to this question at the end of the second chapter, after having considered the treatment of the theoretical problem of the existence of others.

<sup>6</sup> Obviously, Sartre knew that concrete blockhouses did not exist in Schopenhauer’s time, when they were built from wood. The German word used by Schopenhauer to characterize the sort of structure in which the “theoretical egoist” would fortify himself is “*feste*” (both “form” and “stronghold”). I suggest that Sartre is pointing analogically to an aspect of solipsism by using the architectural metaphor, since concrete blockhouses do not have foundations. This is both their strength and their weakness: they are better at resisting military attacks than any other sort of building, but they tend to overturn and sink whenever the ground beneath them moves (tides, earthquakes, landslides, etc.).

in fact by this position with regard to the existence of the other that we suddenly explode the structure of idealism and fall back into a metaphysical realism. (BN, 253)

Thus, like realism, idealism would also revert to its opposite when confronted by solipsism, lapsing into metaphysical realism. Schopenhauer's (2010, p. 104) argument against the allegedly irrefutable "theoretical egoism" was that it would amount to denying the meaning of the question of the reality of the external world. Sartre's characterization of his rejection of "theoretical egoism" as a confession of impotence means that the idealist approach cannot address the issue raised by solipsism. It may be that the multiplicity of systems of representations posited by idealism is not substantial. Nevertheless, the reciprocal exteriority of such systems involves implicitly reinstating the notion of substance, insofar as they would communicate only from without (BN, 253-254).

In the idealist approach, the problem of the existence of other minds thus remains one of the adequacy of the representations one can have of others, "since there is *a real* and a mode of apprehension of this real" (BN, 254). For example, the question remains whether the relation of the phenomenon of felt anger to perceptible anger is the same as that of the objective real to its image (ibid.). Insofar as felt and perceptible anger manifest two objectively noticeable series of effects resulting from a similar cause, if one series is situated in someone else and the other series in myself, then the first would function as the reality of the other. Inasmuch as I can judge that the perceived anger could share the same cause as the anger I feel despite being somehow prevented from accessing someone else's representations, I could not know whether someone else is angry. Thus, facing the solipsist hypothesis, idealism turns into a "dogmatic and totally unjustified realism" (ibid.).

### 1.1.2. From Idealism to Realism via Solipsism

In the *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein similarly suggests that realism is reached from idealism through solipsism. This is manifest in the entry from October 15<sup>th</sup> 1916, which ends as follows:

This is the way I have travelled: Idealism singles men out from the world as unique, solipsism singles me alone out, and at last I see that I too belong with the rest to the world, and so on the one side *nothing* is left over, and on the other side, as unique, *the world*. In this way idealism leads to realism if it is strictly thought out.

The continuous progression from idealism to realism envisaged by Wittgenstein contrasts with the sudden reversals involved in Sartre's account. One could start from the perspective that all humans could be singled out from the world as unique. Wittgenstein shares with Kant, to some extent, the idea that "what cannot be imagined cannot even be talked about" (NB, 15.10.16). One would delude oneself by thinking oneself to be talking *about* what one cannot imagine. Nevertheless, to limit oneself to talking about what one can imagine does not mean granting that one could be limited to talking only about what one can imagine. Taking the second option to be relevant could make it seem that "things acquire 'significance' only through their relation to my will" (ibid.). On the basis of this approach, the things to which one could relate through one's will would be divided into two exhaustive categories: things that could be imagined and thereby meaningfully willed; and things that could not be imagined and thereby cannot be willed (i.e., "everything is what it is and not another thing" [ibid.]). Determinacy would solely belong to things. One conception, which Wittgenstein later calls the "psycho-physical conception", may then seem relevant: "as I can infer my spirit (character, will) from my physiognomy, so I can infer the spirit (will) of each thing from *its* physiognomy" (ibid.).

Based on this, one can produce empty schemata such as, "if my angry appearance implies that I am angry, then I can infer someone else's anger from the angry look on their face" or "if my smile implies that I am happy, then someone else's smile implies that they are happy". The difficulty with this approach is that it presupposes that an inference is implicitly required in order to see that someone is angry or happy (which does not preclude that one can question oneself on the reasons that someone else is happy or angry). The oddness of this conception further appears if one considers its first-person application: "can I *infer* my spirit from my physiognomy?" (ibid.).

If one conceives determinacy as a property internal to things, one could grant that one can learn about oneself on the sole basis of an "inference". For example, one could grant that one can learn whether one is happy or angry by looking at one's reflection in a mirror. Such an approach amounts to granting that one could also learn one's will in such a way. Wittgenstein questions whether such approach can be envisaged: "isn't this relationship purely empirical?" (ibid.). Such an approach could also lead to dissatisfaction with respect to the expressivity of one's body: "does my body really express anything?" (ibid.). If I

make facial expressions before a mirror voluntarily, I could think that I could “infer” that my angry look or smile depends on my maintaining them voluntarily (as an actor can). Considering my body as an experienced “thing”, it would then seem either an easily manipulated shell or a difficult-to-activate mechanism. If I assume it is possible to learn *how* I am feeling only on the basis of my appearance, I could wonder: “is it itself an internal expression of something?” (ibid.), as if *something* could and would need to activate it, irrespective of what one wills and does.

As a counterpart to the reliance on the inferential conception, coupled to the treatment of determinacy as a property internal to things, the difficulty is then that a disjunction seems relevant: “is, e.g., an angry face angry in itself or merely because it is empirically connected with bad temper?” (ibid.). Either how one appears (e.g., angry) belongs to who one is as an internal property to a thing irrespective of what one does and wills, in which case angry faces would be expressive of anger “itself”; or, how one looks is not one’s internal property as a thing and is connected to one’s temper *only* empirically. However, both alternatives involve the application of an apparently causal reasoning to one’s physiognomy: if I were to look this or that way and do this and this, then I should be such and such. Wittgenstein rejects the idea that causality could explain the relations between physiognomy and character: “it is clear that the causal nexus is not a nexus at all” (ibid.). This way, one is brought to solipsism:

Now is it true (following the psycho-physical conception) that my character is expressed only in the build of my body or brain and not equally in the build of the rest of the world? (ibid.)

Applying the psycho-physical concept to oneself may lead to a further assumption. If one grants that one can learn one’s spirit or will solely through empirical inferences, then one could also grant that one can also learn one’s character this way. This would involve one’s character being expressed in one’s body or brain, first to the exclusion of others and second in a way that would be beyond one’s reach. I would be such and such irrespective of how I appear or what I do, for “it” would be expressed only in the build (or constitution) of my body or brain. This would amount to rejecting the relevance of awareness: i.e.,

the dimension of existence in which one can question the modalities of one's actions amongst others who can do the same.<sup>7</sup>

Wittgenstein neither passes judgment on such a scenario nor grants its intelligibility. He nevertheless suggests that this interrogation “contains a salient point” (ibid.), which is that somehow the correspondence between my spirit and the world really holds. One is then led to realism. If it is recalled that “solipsism singles me alone out”, it is not only against the background of the alleged application of the whole-part distinction to all that is the case that one is singled out. It is also against the background of the alleged application of the whole-part distinction to all humans that one could single oneself out as alone (thereby conceiving solitude as a property of an individual irrespective of circumstances). By comparison, the distinction between the world as a whole and all individuals is not internalized in Schopenhauer's account of will. On his approach, one's intuition of the world involves a disjunction: one intuits the world either as will or as representation. The difficulty is that, as will, the world cannot coincide with that of the individual who intuits it as representation. This difficulty stems from the requirement of an *a priori* reference to a unique knowing subject, which generates a tension when taken together with the unicity (i.e., the property of an object of which there is one and only one exemplary under a description) of individuals. The meaning of the world (as the whole of being) and all humans (all those who exist) are thereby *a priori* dissociated from each other. To mark *a posteriori* the distinction between the world and humans suffices to disarm this difficulty (as we shall see in the last part of this chapter, this question is tied to the difficulty of an alleged “reflexive identity”). As such, the “salient point” considered by Wittgenstein may simply amount to saying that if I appeared in such a way and acted in such a way, then I should be such and such:

Only remember that the spirit of the snake, of the lion, is *your* spirit. For it is only from yourself that you know [*kennst*] spirit at all. (Translation modified, ibid.)

Wittgenstein does not use the term “acquaintance” to characterize one's relation to spirit or will. This would straightforwardly amount to treating this

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<sup>7</sup> Sartre's critical approach to ipseity will be studied in Chapter 2. See “The Question of Human Individuality” in *Le parler de soi* (Descombes, 2014, pp. 144-181) for a contemporary and critical approach to the relation between self-awareness and ipseity in phenomenology.

relationship as empirical, or at least univocally dependent on passive experience. Self-knowledge could then be accountable in terms of content acquired through perception.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Wittgenstein suggests that the spirit of a lion or snake stems from the projection of one's implicit understanding of one's own will on an animal. This immediately raises the question of why a spirit characterized in such and such a way is ascribed to one animal rather than another: "now of course, the question is why I have given a snake just this spirit" (ibid.). Due to its cultural overdetermination, that Wittgenstein considers the example of the snake is of particular interest (for it could embody the archetype of "an evil spirit"). Wittgenstein provides a clue to answer questions on such imagery (not on animals):

[T]he answer to this can only lie in the psycho-physical parallelism: If I were to look like the snake and to do what it does, then I should be such-and-such.

The same with the elephant, with the fly, with the wasp.

But the question arises whether even here, my body is not on the same level with that of the wasp and of the snake (and surely it is so), so that I have neither inferred from that of the wasp to mine nor from mine to that of the wasp. (ibid.)

The psycho-physical parallelism considered by Wittgenstein involves the reciprocal ordering of independent psyches distinguished from bodies. This can be expressed by means of an analogy: this body is to "itself" in a similar, parallel psychic relation as mine is to "myself". But this analogy involves bodies being perceived by each other on a similar level, where no inference between one's body and those of animals is required, that is, realism. However, at this stage, realism can be understood in two ways: either independent from or committed to the psycho-physical parallelism (and thus to the analogic approach). Realism committed to psycho-physical parallelism (which Sartre calls "metaphysical realism") is called into question by Wittgenstein: "is this the solution of the puzzle why men have always believed that there was *one* spirit common to the whole world?" (ibid.).<sup>9</sup> The "solution" considered at this stage is the implicit counterpart of acknowledging that one's will could *not* have created all there is (thereby

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<sup>8</sup> I will return to this question in the second part of the fourth chapter, when I will consider Wittgenstein's criticism of Moore's and Russell's approaches to the notion of subject.

<sup>9</sup> I will return at the end of the fourth chapter to Wittgenstein's concern with this view and its importance in accounting for his way of addressing the issue of solipsism in the *Tractatus*.

remaining unresolved with respect to the would-be opposite possibility). One's will or spirit would need to be distinguished from that which produced the reciprocal ordering of independent spirited bodies. There should, accordingly, be one spirit common to the whole world, which could infuse all its parts and account for its unicity: "and in that case it would, of course, also be common to lifeless things too". Everything would be part of a unique spirit common to the whole world. Wittgenstein does not specify whether he endorses this conception. Nevertheless, it can be emphasized that realism understood as involving psycho-physical parallelism presupposes that one could be confined to representations.

We may thus note that, for Wittgenstein, as for Sartre, reaching realism that is committed to the psycho-physical parallelism from idealism via solipsism implies one's acknowledgement that everyone is confined to representations. Can this be granted at all? Before turning to how each author confronts this difficulty, I will attempt to formulate one central convergence of their approaches to the issue of solipsism.

### 1.1.3. Could any Individual be the Only One to be Unique?

Sartre and Wittgenstein agree on the following: understanding how realism leads to solipsism implies understanding the difficulty it raises for idealism. This difficulty is not the threat of a confinement to representations, but rather a threat of impersonality. Such idealism (e.g., Schopenhauer's) presupposes that each of us could discover our uniqueness (i.e., the property of each and every individual) by recognizing ourselves as instances of a unique "cognizing subject" from an *a priori* perspective. Such idealism does not claim exclusivity of its perspective, for acknowledging that one has discovered oneself as a "finite" instance of a unique "cognizing subject" does not involve reserving the possibility of such a discovery for anyone in particular. Such an approach would rather presuppose that no one could possibly discover themselves as an instance of a unique "cognizing subject" in a way that could not be shared with others. Nevertheless, what remains presupposed by such an approach is that one could *a priori* fail to "discover" one's counting as a unique "cognizing subject".

Both Sartre and Wittgenstein criticize the idealist requirement of an *a priori* "discovery" of "oneself" (or of "a self") from an *a priori* perspective. The difficulty solipsism raises for such idealism is that it seems that the solipsist could

somehow be right in acting as if he or she should not acknowledge being limited to representations. For idealism, it seems as if the solipsist could suggest a sort of redoubled unicity, something that would be *forbidden* to the idealist in principle (rather than confused). And such idealism could be right to conclude that solipsism rejects any reciprocity by taking for granted the intelligibility of an exclusive perspective on the whole. It is the implicit rejection of both reciprocity and unicity by solipsism that discomforts such idealism.

This explains why Sartre and Wittgenstein present realism as the end point of idealism, or maybe, more simply, how the (transcendental) idealist stance leads to the (metaphysical) realist one. If the threat posed by solipsism is assimilated to being disowned from a “knowledge” of individual unicity, then the thought of a shared *a priori* standpoint on reality which could secure such knowledge may be tempting. Nevertheless, having started with a representation of the world, considering the apparent threat raised by solipsism, one would finally find oneself led to acknowledge reality as it would be *a priori*.

If that is the case, solipsism does not appear to require an additional epistemic privilege from which idealism and realism are exempted, but rather to reject collectively acknowledged epistemic privilege (the idea that one would need infallible “access” to one’s representation) in the name of a private one. Whether any of these ways of epistemically privileging either the collective or the individual is appropriate or legitimate are distinct questions. However, understood as a rejection of collective epistemic privilege (i.e., of infallible “access” to representations), solipsism points to the inanity of an opposition between transcendental idealism and metaphysical realism. Nevertheless, solipsism exposes the inanity of their opposition by *rejecting* them. That is to say, in the solipsist approach, there is the least difference between one’s affirmation that one can only have a representation of the world as a whole and one’s affirmation that the world as a whole is exactly like the representations we have. Solipsism rejects the distinction between the two directions of evaluation (i.e., evaluating reality by means an idea, in an ordinary sense, and evaluating an idea by inspecting).

Thus, considering solipsism at the intersection of idealism and realism enables consideration of a specific difficulty that neither can solve. According to solipsism, the existence of others is superfluous. The approaches of Sartre and Wittgenstein diverge in that the former is first concerned by the aporia resulting

from accounting for the relationships between consciousnesses in external terms only, whereas Wittgenstein is concerned with the difficulties resulting from taking one's knowledge of one's will and character to depend solely on observational experience. However, for both, character is internally tied to one's attitude with respect to others: either all three doctrines (transcendental idealism, solipsism and metaphysical realism) or none of them are to be dismissed. The implicit presupposition of each doctrine is that we can have only mere representations of each other. We may thus now return to the previous question of whether one could intelligibly ratify *a posteriori* that everyone is confined to representations.

## 1.2. The Criticism of the Analogy with the Visual Field

In this section, I argue that Sartre and Wittgenstein agree that the three doctrines (transcendental idealism, solipsism and metaphysical realism) are to be rejected insofar as they all presuppose that an exclusive perspective on the world as a whole can be taken. To presuppose that one can take such a perspective implies a misleading analogy between the relation of the eye with the visual field and the relation of an individual with the world. However, admitting that an individual can take an exclusive perspective on the world presupposes admitting that the visual field can be assimilated to a perspective. The difficulty is that one would need to have seen oneself from an outer perspective on the world in order to establish that the visual field could reduce to a perspective.

I argue in section 1.2.1. that, on Wittgenstein's approach, the idea of a "metaphysical subject" presupposes the assimilation of the visual field to an exclusive perspective. From this perspective, it would be conceivable to remark upon and establish the restrictive limits of our points of view. Indeed, noting the existence of a "metaphysical subject" in the world presupposes that one believes in seeing the world from an exclusive perspective and that all individuals could be identified objectively as "parts" of the world. Next, I argue in section 1.2.2. that, on Sartre's approach, the idea of an objective and exclusive perspective presupposes that one could see oneself from a perspective outside of the world. From this perspective, the manner in which consciousness *should* treat visual impressions could be established. This amounts to the same move as assimilating the modalities under which individuals can evaluate each other for specific purposes with the dimensions that individuals fix in order to evaluate objects.

Finally, I argue in section 1.2.3. that, for both Sartre and Wittgenstein, it is superfluous and misleading to assimilate the modalities under which we can evaluate objects and the modalities under which individuals can evaluate each other objectively for specific purposes.

#### 1.2.1. Can I see “the Eye”?

We have seen that, according to Wittgenstein’s approach in the *Notebooks*, realism relying on psycho-physical parallelism is tantamount to assuming that even lifeless things are parts of one spirit common to the whole world. That is to say, according to this view, seeing an object and seeing a living being amount to the same thing: to see anything, and *a fortiori* oneself, would be to see the partial manifestation of one spirit common to the whole world.

Sartre’s diagnosis of the origin of the problem of the existence of others or others’ minds suffices to consider the pivot of Wittgenstein’s conception: “the common presupposition to idealism and realism is that the constituting negation is an external negation: the Other is the one who is not me and the one who I am not” (BN, 254). One’s relations to others and objects are taken to be accountable for in a uniform manner, inasmuch as space is assumed to separate us from each other. As someone else is perceived by someone within space, “it is a real or ideal space which separates us from the other” (BN, 255). The negation involved in an (empty) judgment bearing on the distinctness of unrelated things (for example, one’s noting that “the table is not the chair”) is taken to be equivalent to the negation involved one’s noting that one is not someone else (e.g., “I am not Paul”) (BN, 254). The counterpart to treating these negations as equivalent is that one’s relation to others is understood in terms of the indifference or unrelatedness of objects. Then, “the only manner in which someone else may reveal oneself to me, is to appear as an *object* to my knowledge” (BN, 255). Although there are theories of knowledge built against the reduction of reality to images, I would have nothing but representations of reality in which others are contained as objects.

In such approaches, only a witness external to both me and the other could decide whether such images were true by comparing them to its “model”. Were such a witness not external to us, he would have only images of us. But then he would be in the same relation to us as we are to each other and could not decide whether his images of us are real. So what Sartre calls the “spatializing

presupposition” poses a dilemma: either one appeals to a unique creator or one leaves the door open to solipsism (BN, 255). One could choose the first option and appeal to a conception of a creator which cannot be distinguished from its creatures. This leads to a conception of realism similar to the one called into question by Wittgenstein, according to which everything is a partial manifestation of one spirit common to the whole world. Sartre underlines the tension that is the outcome of this conception:

If God is I and if he is the other, then what guarantees my own existence? If creation is held to be continuous, I remain always suspended between a distinct existence and a pantheistic fusion with the Creator being. (BN, 256)

One’s existence would be incessantly called into question by the metaphysical realism reached from transcendental idealism through solipsism.<sup>10</sup> As suggested, this tension stems from the implicit acknowledgement that seeing someone could be confused with seeing an object. If seeing someone cannot be confused with seeing an object, the question of whether one can see or be seen as a “part” of the world as a whole could be dismissed. But how can this be established?

For both Sartre and Wittgenstein, confronting this difficulty involves addressing a specific analogy: that the world is to a person what the visual field is to the eye. One can make such an analogy, for one’s perception involves one’s existence and one’s visual perception involves the existence of one’s eye(s). However, to use this analogy to account for and allegedly establish or secure an epistemic relation between an individual and the world is confusing: one would not see in the first person, for it would be “the eye” that would see, irrespective of what that one does. Likewise, one would not think in the first person, as it would be “the subject” who would think, irrespective of who thinks. On such an approach, I could neither know what I mean nor what I do. Wittgenstein criticizes this approach in the *Tractatus*:

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<sup>10</sup> In this passage, Sartre targets implicitly Malebranche. But an expression of a similar tension can be found in *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (Schreber, 2000). Drawing peculiarly on Diamond’s and Conant’s reading of the *Tractatus*, Read has advocated (2001), partially in response to Sass’s (1994) comparison of Wittgenstein’s approach to solipsism with one to schizophrenia, resisting psychopathological approaches that propose treatments to such “illnesses”, to cede the very temptations that nourish the alleged “illnesses”, a proposition with which I agree.

5.633. Where in the world is a metaphysical subject to be noted  
[merken]?  
You say that this case is altogether like that of the eye and the visual  
field.

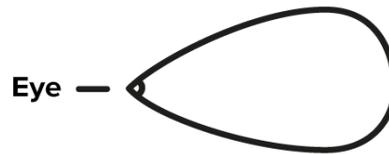
The opening question can be interpreted in two ways: either as awaiting an answer comprising the specification of a place where the presence of a “metaphysical subject” could be noted; or, on the contrary, as questioning one’s ability to specify a place, possibly by pointing, where a “metaphysical subject” could be noted.

Wittgenstein immediately asks his reader to consider the objection that he assumes would be presented to his criticism: that the relationship between the world and a “metaphysical subject” would be analogous to the relationship between the visual field and the eye. Just as the availability of a visual field to someone involves the existence of the eye, so too the availability of a world to someone would presuppose the existence of the subject as “part” of the world, as a “metaphysical subject”. Wittgenstein presents this analogy as a potential objection, and by doing so he invites his reader to question the intelligibility of noting the existence of a “metaphysical subject”. He argues that such an analogy cannot constitute an objection to his criticism, for it would then need to be conclusive, informative and relevant. Wittgenstein rejects this approach:

5.633. But you really do not see the eye.  
And from nothing in the visual field can it be concluded that it is seen  
from an eye (*von einem Auge*).

The first rejection is trivial. One can see the reflections of one’s eyes in a mirror, on the surface of water or in someone else’s pupils. One can also see other people’s eyes. But, in the present, one does not see “the eye”. The analogy does not, therefore, establish that “the eye” sees rather than someone. The second rejection is more radical, for it amounts to rejecting the assimilation of, among other modalities, visual perception to an inference or to reasoning. In reasoning, a conclusion can be drawn from premises. However, it is at best unclear that this applies to perception (which is independent from our ability to infer on the basis of that which we perceive). To hold that there should be such premises-of-perception *a priori* can lead to confusion. If one supposes that something can be seen “from” an eye, then one assumes that one’s situation would be intelligible on the sole basis of one’s position at a place in (idealized) space. Wittgenstein also rejects this approach:

5.6331. For the form of the visual field has not a form like this:



Suppose that one focuses one's eyes on something unknown or unidentified. One can say "I see something" to report one's experience to someone else. One could also report one's experience by saying, "there is something in my visual field". Both expressions could convey the same information: that something, although unknown or unidentified, has been seen by someone. The second does not involve that its utterer can see the visual field. But the drawing above would imply that one can "see" the visual field, "discover" its "limits" or "form", and "show" it to others. However, it is striking that the schema occupies a place in one's visual field. That is to say, it does not show what its author assumed it shows (that the visual field has a "form"). On the contrary, it suggests that one's desire to show that the visual field is limited stems from a confusion. How to address such confusion?<sup>11</sup>

This schema appears in the *Notebooks* less than a week after Wittgenstein's rejection of the assimilation of the first-person pronoun to the designator of an object: "the I is not an object" (NB, 7.8.16) and "I objectively confront every object. But not the I" (NB, 11.8.16). While one can objectively think that one confronts objects, the same does not apply to oneself. What is at stake is the relevance of what Sullivan (1996, p. 204) calls the "object-centred view". He characterizes this idea as follows: "a range of objects with certain possibilities built into their natures; and the world is limited to whatever can be cobbled together out of this material" (Sullivan, 1996, p. 205). He makes three remarks on this idea. First, it seems to suffice in order to conceive the limits of language and world as different from what they are inasmuch as the range of propositions is taken to be fixed by an alleged initial range of objects (ibid.). Second, in such an

<sup>11</sup> The reading proposed here is indebted to Sullivan (1996, p. 198), Floyd (1998, p. 181) and Friedlander (2001, pp. 116-117).

approach world and language are not immediately conceived as totalities. Third, it leads to assigning a foundational role to acquaintance with objects with respect to our understanding of propositions (Sullivan, 1996, p. 206). The “object-centred view” is tied to an illusion called into question by Wittgenstein a few days before his drawing of the previously mentioned schema: “Isn’t the thinking subject in the last resort mere superstition?” (NB, 4.8.16). To this question, he answers that “the thinking subject is surely a mere illusion. But the willing subject exists” (NB, 5.8.16).

An exchange of places between two persons is conceivable. From each place that one can occupy, someone can see what is available to one’s sight from that place. Different places that could be taken by different persons can be characterized as perspectives, insofar as one can *imagine* what one could see from a place that is different from the one that one occupies. Now, could the visual field be considered as a perspective at all?

The “object-centred view”, with the correlative illusion of “the metaphysical subject” which goes with it, as mentioned earlier, implies the assumption that one’s visual field could be a perspective. The schema presents the presumption that one could discover, from one place, a limit that everyone else has failed to notice and that should be presented as a limitation or restrictive limit. So the concept of perspective involved in the “object-centred view” involves its exclusivity. Thereby, the superstition considered by Wittgenstein (“the metaphysical subject”) is not unreal as such. If it is further recalled that “the metaphysical subject” is conceived as a “part” of the “world”, then it may further be explained that such a view involves assuming that one could see the world as a whole from one’s exclusive perspective, irrespective of limits that would apply to anyone else. To this extent, the “object-centred view” is internally tied to a concept of “world” which presupposes that it could be seen as a whole from an exclusive perspective. Accordingly, the world would not be all that is the case, but at best, *merely* all there is. Furthermore, the meaning of all that can be seen and thought by someone could be uniformly considered from an exclusive perspective.

To call into question the superstition or illusion addressed by Wittgenstein, a use he introduces of the concept of object a few months later can be considered:

It is clear, so to speak, that we need a foothold for the will in the world.  
 The will is an attitude of the subject to the world. [...].  
 This is clear: it is impossible to will without already performing the act of the will.  
 The act of the will is not the cause of the action but is the action itself.  
 One cannot will without acting.  
 If the will has to have an object in the world, the object can be the intended action itself.  
 And the will must have an object. (NB, 4.11.1916)

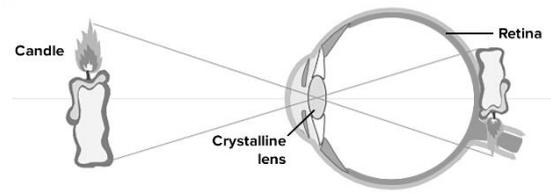
On this approach, an “object” can be one’s action. This concept of object cannot be detached from its straightforward intelligibility (as much to oneself as to others), for it presupposes one’s situation within a logical space (i.e., a space of relevant possibilities that one can consider and share with others). Wittgenstein states of our approach to the world: “our life is endless, as our visual field is limitless” (TLP, 6.4311). Could one’s visual field be a perspective at all? Is the application of the whole-part distinction to the visual field not misleading? Before addressing these questions in detail, I will turn to Sartre’s approach, which also addresses the difficulty involved in relying on the analogy with the visual field.

### 1.2.2. The Problem of “Inverted Vision”

Sartre also addresses the confusion stemming from the analogy with the visual field. In *Being and Nothingness*, this difficulty is treated after the issue raised by solipsism under its theoretical form. Nevertheless, in order to compare the approaches of Wittgenstein and Sartre on this point, I will anticipate the latter’s approach by considering his elucidation of the problem of “inverted vision”:

We know the question posed by the physiologists: “how can we set upright the objects which are painted upside down on our retina?” We know as well the answer of the philosophers: “There is no problem. An object is upright or inverted in relation to the rest of the universe. To perceive the whole universe inverted means nothing, for it would have to be inverted in relation to something.” (BN, 329)

Sartre sides with philosophers against physiologists in rejecting that the problem of “inverted vision” is meaningful. The physiologist approach assumes that one should invert retinal impressions of objects in order to see them upright. One does not perceive objects but objects-seen-through-their-retinal-impressions. Sartre diagnoses how this pseudo-problem arose: “one has wanted to link my consciousness to the body of someone else” (BN, 329). The schema he considers is the following:



The difficulty raised by this schema is similar to the one considered by Wittgenstein, for its author assumed it could show that one would need to (intentionally) set retinal impressions upright. However, as Kuhn (1970, p. 127) puts it, “the inverting glasses show that two men with different retinal impressions can see the same thing”. Kuhn refers in this passage to an experiment initially conducted by Stratton in 1897, and which was later reproduced several times, notably by Carr in 1935 and Kohler in 1964 (Stratton, 1897) aimed to question whether the inverted image posited by theories of upright vision is a necessary condition of our seeing things in an upright position. His 1887 experiment consisted in making an individual wear inverting glasses for ten days. Inverting glasses can be defined as a device which allows one to see in a way in which one’s surroundings seem to be upside-down. Stratton noted that in less than a week, an individual can get used to wearing such glasses. That is to say, an individual can learn to do whatever he can without the inverting glasses, although this was initially rendered difficult by the glasses. If we consider abstractly, as Kuhn did, the “retinal impressions” of two individuals, only one of whom is wearing inverting glasses, these impressions are different although they are impressions of one and only one object. Concretely put, if we could see simultaneously any two individuals looking at the same object, only one of whom is wearing inverting glasses, we could see on the former’s eyes what we would see upside-down on the latter’s ones. Kuhn suggests that Stratton’s experiment establishes that it does not follow from such observable differences it does not follow that two individuals do not see the same object.

This point is independent of but nevertheless supports Sartre’s approach: there is no such thing as an (intentional) rectification of perception (one which could allegedly be obtained by an abstract exercise of will). Assuming that one needs to rectify visual perception is the counterpart of a causal approach to perception, according to which objects imprint themselves on sense “organs”. However, as previously noted, this would also require that one’s situation is

intelligible on the sole basis of one's position in (idealized) space. Here, as before, the distinction between perspectives and standpoints is at issue: "so far as the physicians have had any experience with my body, it was with my body in the midst of the world and as it is for others. My body as it is for me does not appear to me in the midst of the world" (BN, 327). Sartre argues that this conception, which he calls "the physical point of view – i.e., the point of view of the outside", has been deliberately chosen to explain vision: "we have considered a dead eye in the midst of the visible world in order to account for the visibility of the world" (BN, 329).

Sartre does not contest physiological knowledge as a whole, but emphasizes the difficulty implied in situating oneself in the world by internalizing an arbitrary pre-ordering of knowledge: "to start from experiments that physicians may have done on my body amounts to starting from my body *in the midst of the world* and such as it is for someone else" (translation mine, BN, 327). This point concerns idealism: "my body, for Schopenhauer is nothing but 'the immediate object'" (BN, 255). For example, in seeing a radiograph or image of one's bodily parts, one may see one's body as an "entirely constituted object, as a *this* among other thises" (BN, 328). Nevertheless, taking the body "as a certain *thing* having its own laws and capable of being defined from outside" tends to obscure the relations of consciousness to the body (BN, 325). The upshot of this approach is to distinguish one's reflexive assimilation of a body to an object of study (as when a physiologist studies a human body) from one's non-thetic assimilation of one's body to an object (as when someone thinks of *his* or *her* body as a physiologist would of *a* body).

This difficulty is tied to Sartre's earlier criticism of what he calls the "primacy of knowledge". Such primacy amounts to the idea that consciousness could be "a knowledge turned back upon itself" (BN, 7). This idea presupposes the reduction of consciousness to knowledge (BN, 8). Sartre, in order to provide the schema of the approach to which such an idea leads, states Alain's formula: "to know is to know that one knows" (BN, 8). This primacy can be characterized as the requirement that reflexion would necessarily precede consciousness in every sense. In order to surmount the difficulties such approaches raise, Sartre provides an account to render intelligible that some consciousnesses are irreducible to reflexive ones (such as affective ones). However, this account, as we shall see,

cannot be detached from both the intelligibility of science and the certainty of the existence of others.

Sartre considers the opposite of Husserl's affirmation of intentionality (BN, 7). To affirm that every consciousness is consciousness of something amounts to rejecting that a consciousness could not posit what Sartre calls a "transcendent object" (which, as we shall see, can be understood as a situated thought). At issue is the relevance of that which was earlier called the "object-centred view". Sartre suggests that attempts to account for the "contents" of consciousness, according to which the idea of neutral "data" acquires different meanings according to different referential systems, leads to reification of consciousness. One can imagine that the process of studying a thing in order to unfold and inventory its content can continue indefinitely. To require the same with respect to consciousness is therefore misleading: "to introduce this opacity [i.e., of things] into consciousness would be to refer to infinity the inventory which it can make of itself" (BN, 7). In order to propose an alternative account of consciousness which does not raise such a difficulty, Sartre suggests that it is necessary to re-establish the "true connection [of consciousness] with the world, to know that consciousness is a positional consciousness *of* the world" (ibid.). In his approach, every consciousness is positional, which means that every knowing consciousness "transcends itself in order to reach an object" and "exhausts itself in this same positing" (BN, 7-8). To account for the intelligibility of reflexive consciousness, it is necessary and sufficient that any knowing consciousness has knowledge of one and only one object:

The necessary and sufficient condition for a knowing consciousness to be knowledge of its object, is that it be consciousness of itself as being that knowledge. (BN, 8)

To render intelligible the intentionality of a knowing consciousness, no more than one object is required, but no less than one object could suffice. The concept of object that Sartre introduces cannot be detached from situated reflexion:

Reflexive consciousness posits the reflected consciousness as its object: I pass, in the act of reflexion, judgements on the reflected consciousness, I am ashamed of it, I am proud of it, I want it, I refuse it, etc. (Translation mine, BN, 9)

According to this approach, one can posit by reflexion that which retrospectively appears as its object. It nevertheless remains unintelligible that my

perception could “know” or “posit” its objects. These two distinct aspects of consciousness (perceptive and reflexive) temporally coincide without getting mixed: “every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself” (BN, 9). Sartre provides an example. Suppose I count a group of objects and someone interrupts me to ask, “what are you doing?” I can answer that “I am counting” (inasmuch as I have not yet finished counting). To provide such an answer does not require either a thetic or a positional consciousness of oneself-as-counting. But in order to answer the question that is asked, I reflexively consider some of my past consciousnesses which are not thetic or positional. Such past consciousnesses are not reflexive, although I can consider them reflexively; rather, they are “forever not-reflected-on in my immediate past” (BN, 9). And I can reflexively spell out *the* consciousness which answers the question that has been posed to me.

Positional or thetical consciousness is thus characterized as positing as its object one consciousness, while non-positional or non-thetical consciousness does not posit or know an object. Every positional or thetical consciousness implies a non-positional or non-thetical consciousness as its object. But a non-positional or non-thetical consciousness does not need to have a positional or thetical consciousness as its object. As suggested by Morris (2008, p. 67), “positional” and “thetical” can and should be used equivalently in order to distinguish the reflexive from the pre-reflexive regime of consciousness.

The primacy of reflexion over consciousness can thus be rejected: “it is non-reflexive consciousness which renders reflexion possible” (translation mine, BN, 9). Accounting for one’s involvement in an activity requires what Sartre calls an “operator intention”, which he characterizes using Heidegger’s idiom of “revealing-revealed” (BN, 9). The modality of one’s consciousness in action is not reflexive; it is unreflexive (BN, 60). However, this does not suggest that every action is unreflexive (i.e., to count a group of objects in order to make an inventory differs from counting them without a reason). Thus consciousness is confused with reflexive consciousness if self-consciousness is understood on the model of the consciousness of objects:

It is the very nature of consciousness to exist “in a circle”. The idea can be expressed in these terms: every consciousness exists as conscious of existing. We understand now why the first consciousness of consciousness is not positional: it is because it is one with the consciousness of which it is consciousness. At one stroke it determines itself as consciousness of perception and as perception. The necessity of

syntax has compelled us hitherto to speak of the “non-positional consciousness of self”. But we can no longer use this expression in which the “of self” still evokes the idea of knowledge. (Henceforth we shall put the “of” inside parentheses [to point that it answers only to a grammatical constraint]). (Translation modified, BN, 20)

To distinguish between “*conscience (de) soi*” and “*conscience de soi*” is a way for Sartre to prevent the confusion between self-consciousness and consciousness of objects. As suggested earlier, intentional consciousness can be considered in two ways: as the positional consciousness of an object involved while one intentionally observes something for a purpose (e.g., for a study, which differs from gazing at an object);<sup>12</sup> and as the non-thetic relation of consciousness with itself while absorbed in an activity. Nevertheless, does the intelligibility of a non-thetical relation of consciousness with *itself* not ultimately require that consciousness can posit itself *as* object?

To solve this issue, I follow Narboux’s (2015, p. 73) suggestion that accounting for Sartre’s approach requires marking the grammatical distinction between indirect reflexive pronouns and direct reflexive pronouns. Sartre (2003, p. 157) explicitly analyses the function played by the indirect reflexive pronoun “oneself”:

“He bends himself” indicates well that the “myself” that we find here is not exactly the “he”; without which it would not be necessary to use two words. There is a slight gap. (Translation mine)

The reflexive pronoun does not, in the sentence “he bends himself”, satisfy the function of the object of the process expressed by the verb (as “an iron-bar” in “he bends an iron-bar”). Sartre suggests, rather, that the indirect reflexive pronoun “oneself” is required to describe an action without referring. In the first case, “oneself” necessarily points to the subject of the process expressed by the verb. For example, consider a sentence which involves a direct reflexive pronoun such as “he heals himself” (e.g., when someone applies a basic treatment to a wound). In this case, the process expressed by the verb does contingently presuppose that a person has initiated a process of healing as an agent that one also undergoes as a patient. It implies a single action which consists in healing oneself and in which one person endorses the two roles of the

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<sup>12</sup> I thank Rupert Read for drawing my attention to the importance of the distinction between gazing and looking in order to address the issue of solipsism (see Wittgenstein, PI, 2009, §411). I will stress the importance of this distinction for Sartre in Chapter 2.

healer and the patient. Nevertheless, the endorsement of these two roles by a single person during one action is contingent, for it is conceivable that someone else with the relevant knowledge could have applied the same (basic) treatment.<sup>13</sup> The identity of the one who endorses the role of the healer and the one who endorses the role of the healed is thus not necessary. Simply, an individual can express that he is realizing a reflexive action by means of a sentence which involves a reflexive diathesis (e.g., “I heal myself”).

The same does not apply to a French sentence such as “*Il s’ennuie*”, which can be correctly translated as “he’s getting bored” and literally translated as “he’s boring himself” (BN, 100). Such a sentence does not involve a reflexive diathesis in French or in its literal translation. That is to say, someone can describe the situation of someone else by means of such a sentence without assuming this situation has been reflexively planned or results from an activity of the person whose situation is described. Narboux (2015, p. 73) underscores that “‘to get bored’ does not amount to boring someone or an aspect of someone”. Sartre suggests the duality that is marked by “he” and “himself” in the literal translation “he’s boring himself” points to a relation of “the subject with himself” involved by “he’s getting bored” (BN, 100).

Sartre further rejects the idea that such a relation points to a property of a “self”. It is one and the same thing to take such a relation to be constitutive of self-consciousness and to confuse pre-reflexive consciousness with the non-thetic relation of consciousness with itself\*<sup>14</sup> (while intentionally absorbed in an activity). The thetic (yet pre-reflexive and unintentional) relation of a consciousness with itself is what Sartre calls “presence to self”.<sup>15</sup> Sartre suggests that we took for “a plenitude of existence” what amounts to a prejudice (BN, 101), for to assimilate “presence to self” to self-consciousness amounts to privileging the modality of consciousness under which “the self” is assumed:

The self therefore represents an ideal distance within the immanence of the subject in relation to himself, a way of *not being his own coincidence*. (BN, 101)

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<sup>13</sup> For a detailed account, see *Le Parler de Soi* (Descombes, 2014, pp. 130-132).

<sup>14</sup> This symbol is here used after Castaneda (1999) and Narboux (2015) to mark the grammatical distinction between the indirect reflexive pronoun and the direct reflexive pronoun.

<sup>15</sup> This will be studied in chapter 2.

The necessity for self-consciousness to not coincide with itself\* is pre-reflexively assimilated to the contingency of a consciousness that does not coincide with itself. The quest for the “being” of consciousness is not incidental to this difficulty:

The being of consciousness qua consciousness is to exist *at a distance from oneself* as presence to itself and this null distance that being carries in its being, it is Nothingness. (BN, 102)

The absolute distinction between “being” and “nothingness” as conceived by Sartre is designed to confront the (individual and collective) difficulty raised by one’s engagement in such a quest. Four years after *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (Sartre J.-P. , 2003, p. 147) spells out his diagnosis of the nexus of this difficulty:

In reflexion, a duplication operates itself such that man is object, to a certain extent and according to characters to elucidate, for himself. But then, in that case, it is evident [...] that the “cogito” is first knowledge. In other words, have not we confused, at our starting point, consciousness and knowledge? (Sartre J.-P. , 2003, p. 147)

The nexus of the difficulty is a confusion between knowledge and consciousness on the basis of the implicit reliance on reflexive diathesis as a unique model for reflexion.<sup>16</sup> Sartre draws attention to the “duplication of man as object” on reflexion as not being a process which could be initiated by someone. He further suggests that this difficulty should be taken into account: consciousness cannot be accounted for solely in terms of knowledge.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, this does not involve renouncing knowledge in any sense. Sartre intends, rather, to establish that alleged problems such as that of “inverted vision” stem from adopting an absolute approach to space and objectivity, which is the common background of transcendental idealism, solipsism and

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<sup>16</sup> Three models for the reflexive diathesis can be provided. The first is the reflection of a light-ray in a mirror (Narboux, 2016, p. 18). The second is the drama of the *Sprinkler Sprinkled*, in which a gardener is tricked into sprinkling himself, as suggested by Descombes (2004, p. 111) and Narboux (2016, p. 18). And the third is the transitive process through which a person “sees herself in a mirror” as suggested by Tesnière (1959, p. 242), Descombes (2004, p. 165) and Narboux (2016, p. 18).

<sup>17</sup> Sartre’s approach is compatible, up to a point, with Cavell’s in *The Claim of Reason*. There, Cavell suggests, against the background of Clarke’s (1972) seminal article “The legacy of skepticism”, a deep relationship between the works of Wittgenstein and Heidegger: “the truth of skepticism, or what I might call the moral of skepticism, namely, that the human creature’s basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing” (Cavell, 1979, p. 241). On the “truth of skepticism”, see Mulhall (1994, pp. 102-105), Hammer (2002, pp. 32-39) and Shieh (2006).

metaphysical realism. Sartre suggests that such approaches assume that space separate us from each other. Although idealism is right to insist on “the fact that relation makes the world”, to assume that doing so needs to be understood within the paradigm of Newtonian science (thereby against the background of an absolute conception of space) led idealism to explicate “the limit-concept of absolute objectivity” (BN, 331).

Sartre further suggests that the concept of “absolute objectivity” is tantamount to a “desert world” or “world without humans” and thereby to a contradiction (BN, 331). Someone can imagine a world without humans if this is understood circumstantially. The intelligibility of such a scenario does not presuppose rejecting the possibility that others could occupy some standpoint in the world. Nor does this scenario amount to the (fictive) situation faced by Robinson Crusoe, which is intelligible only against the background of his isolation from others. Instead, it would be equivalent to a counterfactual situation in which a survivor of a major catastrophe or war lacked any assurance of being the only one who remained. In this counterfactual world, one would suffer from solitude. Nevertheless, inasmuch as such a scenario is counterfactual, it is neither conclusive nor informative.<sup>18</sup>

The attempt to substitute “dogmatic truth” for “reciprocal convenience relation among representations” thereby leads to “its own destruction”. Such an approach assumes that the position of an observer is external both to one’s original relation to things and to one’s place in the world. Sartre underlines the rejection of such an approach by the scientists of his time (i.e. Broglie, Heisenberg and Einstein). Accounting for relativity does not amount to endorsing relativism (BN, 332). Rather, it is up to us to account for the intelligibility of our knowledge of objects in ways that are compatible both with our everyday relations to objects in the world and with scientific progress. The notion he uses to exemplify this point is speed: one can observe the movement of one body toward another with naked eyes and then with a microscope; in the second case, the movement will seem faster. Sartre expresses this idea as follows:

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<sup>18</sup> In particular, granting the non-circumstantial relevance of such a scenario would amount to discounting the relevance of conditionality for situated reasoning. In other words, to rejecting the intelligibility of that which is called “conditional logic”. On this point, see Burgess (2012, p. 71). As we shall see both at the end of the present chapter and in the fourth one, Sartre proposes an account of freedom which cannot be detached from conditionality.

The notion of speed no longer means anything unless it is speed in relation to given dimensions of a body in motion. But it is ourselves who decide these dimensions by our very upsurge into the world and it is very necessary that we decide them, for otherwise they would not be at all. Thus they are relative not to the knowledge which we get of them but to our primary engagement at the heart of the world. (BN, 332)

Sartre states that we decide which dimensions of bodies and objects we measure. This proposition does not involve creating these dimensions by an act of will; nor does it mean that we are condemned to arbitrariness because we need to decide these dimensions. Rather, it says that insofar as one takes for granted some dimensions (notably registered in ordinary language), one may measure an object in a determinate way. This provides an additional key to understanding Sartre's criticism of relying on the visual field analogy in order to understand one's relation to the body. A human body can be studied as an object whose dimensions are decided and measured. However, this involves that the modality under which one reflexively considers somebody as a body, or as a professional who studies a corpse, is secondary with respect to the modality under which one is (non-thetically) conscious of one's body. I cannot have a perspective on my body: "the body is the point of view on which there cannot be a point of view" (BN, 330). To conceive the relation between consciousness and body as a contingent attachment (e.g., as if consciousness were presented as "reaching" the world "through" the body) is the obverse of the fantasy that their detachment could be observed (rather than considering their distinction for specific purposes, such as healing).

Sartre here confronts a difficulty similar to the one considered by Wittgenstein. If I were to have a point of view "on" my body, then it would need to be an exclusive one. Such a point of view would have to be obtained from a point of view *on* the world as a whole (for one could allegedly take a point of view from a point of view distinct from the one that one occupies). Furthermore, such a point of view could also be from side on, for one could judge that someone else could be deprived of one's "own" point of view:

The consciousness of bad faith [...] has for ideal to judge oneself, that is to say to take on oneself the point of view of [the other] (*l'autre*). (BN, 549)

This is a key aspect of Sartre's approach: "to prejudge" is not a verb which can designate an intentional (thus reflexive) activity. Rather, attempts to judge oneself from the point of view of the other amount to prejudging oneself.<sup>19</sup> However, we now can formulate what is common to Sartre's and Wittgenstein's approach to the issue raised by solipsism.

### 1.2.3. No one could have been Nobody

We have seen that Sartre underscores how the dimensions according to which objects are evaluated are fixed by us, as well as that individuals can evaluate each other objectively for specific purposes, for reasons at certain occasions, and for certain reasons by means of public criteria (work, sport, etc.). Solipsism confuses these senses of evaluation by considering them independently from their circumstances. On Wittgenstein's approach, this is tied to superstition; on Sartre's, to prejudice. Prejudice and superstition are intertwined. The analogy with the visual field analogy manifests this internal relation, inasmuch as it cannot be conclusive, informative or relevant. Schemas based on such an analogy do not satisfy the explanatory role ascribed to them. They testify to attitudes with respect to the world and to others, according to which perceiving could be tantamount to seeing "parts" of "the world" from an exclusive perspective and acting on this basis. These attitudes lead to metaphysical realism (on Sartre's terms) or realism committed to psycho-physical parallelism (on Wittgenstein's terms).

However, it is one thing to suggest that solipsism can hardly be acknowledged whenever its presuppositions are considered reflexively. It is quite another thing to establish how the problem it raises can be solved or dissolved. What cannot help in this, according to both Sartre and Wittgenstein, is an approach where categorical distinctions are taken to impose limitations on what can be thought and said.<sup>20</sup> That is to say, in such an approach the correct "sorting" of objects and persons would have to be secured from an exclusive perspective: a position from where one could identify oneself or refer to oneself (as a

<sup>19</sup> This point will be explained in further detail in chapter 4.

<sup>20</sup> I here rely on Narboux's (2015, p. 53) suggestion that construing categorical distinctions as privations is the crucial move by which categories came to be thought of as "counts of indictment".

“metaphysical subject”, “thinking substance”, “cognizing subject” or instance of “the Person”). What can be granted to such approaches is that the fantasy of an exclusive perspective is hardly claimed as such. As such, one can feel unsatisfied by criticisms of schemas drawn on the basis of the analogy with the visual field. Are such schemas not produced from a theoretical point of view independent of any schema, a perspective from which such schemas could be legitimately produced? That is to say, a reflexive concern that might be voiced with respect to these criticisms is the following: how can such criticisms be *decisive*?

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein envisages “a sign language” (*Zeichensprache*) which obeys the rules of “logical grammar” (*logischen grammatik*) or “logical syntax” (*logischen Syntax*) in order to avoid mistakes that would be encountered in abundance in philosophy (TLP, 3.325). His approach, on the reading I propose, puts into relief that the “logic of depiction” (*logik der Abbildung*) cannot be treated as a superficial aspect of language (TLP, 4.015). If it is true that the pretence displayed by the schema cannot be abstracted from it, then its rejection presents an ethical dimension. In this approach, the criticism of philosophy proposed by Wittgenstein is not conditional.

The early approach of Sartre to solipsism provide additional means to address the issue it raises. Sartre’s concern is with the meaning of “freedom”, and his positive import is that he proposes a public account for interiorizing the conditionality of situated reasoning. Both unconditional freedom and exclusive freedom are fictions. Nevertheless, if it is true that solipsism stems from a confusion which leads to further confusion, which thereby has a collective dimension, then we need to be on guard against what Sartre calls “the realm of subjectivity”. To this end, he proposes, as we shall see, an account of freedom that cannot be detached from reciprocity, and which is thereby incompatible with neglecting the freedom of others for the sake of what he suggests is the prejudice toward “plenitude of existence”.

The approaches of both authors are compatible in that they criticize the conceivability of the idea of self-inheritance in relation to the one of a self-discovery.<sup>21</sup> “Self-discovery”, as earlier introduced, means a discovery that (1) is necessarily made by its discoverer (it cannot be made by another discoverer) and

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<sup>21</sup> The approach I propose is indebted to Narboux (Forthcoming) and Descombes (2014, pp. 189-192).

that (2) its discoverer can necessarily make (its discoverer could not fail to make it). A “self-discovery”, in this use, at once (2) essentially makes its discoverer and (1) is essentially made by that very same discoverer. Similarly, a “self-inheritance”, as I use this phrase, means an inheritance that (1) is necessarily legated to its inheritor (it cannot be inherited by another inheritor) and that (2) is necessarily inherited by its inheritor (it cannot be inherited from another inheritor).

Thus, if the solipsist can discover that he is the only individual there could be, then no one but him could have made such discovery. And if the solipsist can report such a discovery to himself, then no one but him could inherit the language to report such discovery from him. However, could this have happened at all?

I will argue that, according both to Sartre and Wittgenstein, it is not necessary and further misleading to grant that this could have happened. To make a discovery implies that the object of discovery is independent from the discoverer. Similarly, to inherit implies that the inheritance is independent from the inheritor. In both cases, to be a discoverer or an inheritor is irreducible to a property of an individual. To discover or inherit presuppose that others can, like oneself, discover or inherit.

The central aspect of solipsism confronted here is that admitting it would presuppose our reciprocal confinement to representations. However, although it can be granted that someone can affirm being called “nobody” (as Ulysses in *The Odyssey*), “nobody” could not have been a name in the first place. Consequently, the King’s wish to “have the eyes” of Alice in *Through the Looking Glass* and see “Nobody”, the messenger, at a distance (Carroll, 2009, p. 199) might suggest a difficulty when it is admitted that its use can be accounted for as if it were a name. In the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein (1998, p. 69) underscores this: “Imagine a language in which, instead of ‘I found nobody in the room’, one said ‘I found Mr. Nobody in the room’. Imagine the philosophical problems which would arise out of such a convention”. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre confronts a similar approach formulated during the Second World War, that of Rougemont, who, under his own terms, assumed he could literally detect and identify “Nobody”. In his approach, “the Devil” could be portrayed as “No-body” (Rougemont, 1944, p. 22). The difficulty here would be that “Nobody himself remains Someone” (Rougemont, 1944, p. 32). However, do we need to grant that such identification is possible and needed?

The register of theatricality is independent from the alleged need to admitting such a would-be identification. As Sartre suggests, reflexion on fiction allows one to represent human attitudes to oneself, thereby distinguishing what belongs to theatricality from what does not belong to it in ordinary situations. However can we grant that our language could and would need to be revised on the basis of a private identification from an exclusive perspective? In order to address this question, in the second chapter, I will start by considering Sartre's solution to the theoretical problem of the existence of others. In the third chapter, I will turn to Wittgenstein's dissolution of the problem of the theoretical problem of the existence of other minds. In the fourth chapter, I will then focus on both thinkers' criticisms of the idea of self-discovery, either from standpoint of the other or from one's own standpoint.

## 2. *Being and Nothingness* on the Theoretical Issue of the Existence of Others

The aim of this chapter is to establish that on Sartre's approach, the theoretical problem of the existence of others is a pseudo-problem. This problem stems from the conflation of the existence of others with their presence. If we presuppose that the certainty of the existence of others depends on their presence in our surroundings, then, in their absence, it can seem conceivable to doubt their existence.

Obviously, one may truly note the absence of someone else (BN, 33), falsely believe that one knows someone else that one sees (BN, 304) and falsely believe that there is someone while there is no one (BN, 304). But is it conceivable that a person may only believe that he sees another person in his presence? Can the existence of someone else be reduced to a probability in an unbeknownst way in every conceivable situation?

To address this question, Sartre's strategy is to dissipate the appearance that it could be *a priori* impossible for one to be certain that others exist. If solipsism cannot be refuted (insofar as the existence of others is certain), then it needs to be shown that someone could neither think oneself nor deny oneself without having beforehand acknowledged or denied the existence of others.

To do this, I argue in section 2.1 that on Sartre's approach, a single consciousness conceived as a concrete whole cannot suffice to constitute itself. To consider abstractly the nucleus of the immediate structures of consciousness on the contrary suffices to establish that in isolation, consciousness realizes itself as a "detotalized totality". Then, I argue in section 2.2., that on Sartre's approach, except in some circumstances (e.g., while writing fiction), calling linguistically the existence of others into question amounts to denying the existence of others. The existence of others cannot and does not require to be proved. On the contrary, the proof of the existence of others is inconceivable. Once the theoretical problem of the existence of others resolved, there remains only a "sort of *de facto* solipsism", that is to say, the attitude of indifference with respect to others, as the counterpart of the pre-reflexive attempt to appropriate the freedom of others.

## 2.1. The Aporia of the Relation of Consciousness to the World

In this section, I argue that on Sartre's approach, a single consciousness, conceived as a concrete whole, cannot suffice to constitute itself. On the contrary, abstracting the nucleus of the immediate structures of consciousness establishes that, in isolation, consciousness realizes itself as a detotalized totality.

In section 2.1.1., I argue that starting from *de facto* relations between consciousness and the world suffices to account for the intelligibility of the human in its relation to the world. Then, in section 2.1.2., I argue that analysis of the conditions of intelligibility of interrogative conduct provides an adequate leading thread for considering the immediate structures of consciousness. Finally, in section 2.1.3., I argue that analysing the nucleus of the immediate structures of consciousness (the absence of self or value whose absence constitutes consciousness as possible) shows that, in isolation, consciousness realizes itself as a detotalized totality. The "mineness" of the world is the counterpart of the pre-reflexive assumption that a single consciousness could be sufficient to constitute itself.

### 2.1.1. The Aporia of the Relation of the For-itself to the In-itself

In Sartre's approach, addressing the issue raised by solipsism requires establishing the insufficiency of a single concrete and conscious whole in its relation to the world (i.e., a "being-in-the-world") to constitute itself as a self-consciousness. This in turn requires establishing that the structures of one's consciousness considered emptily (i.e., reflexively and independently from actions intelligible to other people) do not suffice to account for self-consciousness. To do this, Sartre's first step is establishing that considering, from an abstract perspective, the categorical character of the distinction between consciousness and world as implying that they are related externally leads to an aporia. This aporia is that of the relation of the for-itself to the in-itself. Sartre defines the two notions as follows:

Being is opaque to itself because it is filled with itself. This can be better expressed by saying that *being is what it is*. [...] We shall see that the being of *for-itself* is defined, on the contrary, as being what it is not and not being what it is. [...] Furthermore, it is necessary to oppose this formula – being in itself *is* what it is – to that which designates the being of consciousness. The latter in fact, as we shall see, *has to be* what it is. (BN, 21)

As underscored by Morris (2008, p. 61), the distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself is adequate to dispensing with the view that consciousness should be reified (i.e., either understood as a thing or as a container). At this early stage of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre confronts the views which imply the need for, and possibly the unavoidability of, such reification. As he puts it, “necessity concerns the connection between ideal propositions but not that of existents” (BN, 22). It is unclear that there is any need to suppose that there is no other option than to conceive consciousness on the model of a thing or a container. The aporia of the for-itself and the in-itself is construed by Sartre, but it amounts to considering an objection that can be raised from any view according to which categorical distinctions would necessarily imply restrictive limits or limitations (BN, 23): if “being” is split into two radically heterogeneous “regions” or “types”, the in-itself and the for-itself, how can they be said to belong to the general category of “being”? If these “regions” cannot interact with each other, how can we conceive them as *de facto* related? This question supposes that consciousness and the world are separated in an unbridgeable way. The heterogeneity of consciousness and that at which it is aimed seems to call into question the possibility of their internal relation. As we shall see, the feeling of unavoidability that Sartre questions at this early stage of *Being and Nothingness* stems from the unidimensional character of the approach at this point. Sartre does not explicitly mention here that what he calls human-reality presents different modes of existence that he assumes to be equally fundamental: “the body – our body – has for its peculiar characteristic the fact that it is essentially that which is *known by the Other*. [...] I discover with it for human reality another mode of existence as fundamental as being-for-itself and this I shall call being-for others” (BN, 241).

Taking into account Sartre’s belief in the availability of different modes of existence for human reality matters when reading *Being and Nothingness* as a whole. In his introduction to an earlier edition of the book, Barnes (1992, pp. xlviii-xlix) suggests that:

The body serves as a necessary link by which Sartre sets up a cogito of the Other's existence. We saw that in "La Transcendence de l'Ego" Sartre believed that by making the Ego a part of the psychic and hence an object in the world, he could refute solipsism. In *Being and Nothingness* he states that in the earlier article he had been too optimistic. [...] As far as reasons and proof are concerned, Sartre is convinced that we can never prove the Other's existence.

Having referred to the chapter entitled “The Body as Being-For-Itself: Facticity”,<sup>22</sup> Barnes considers the earlier part on the existence of others (where solipsism is considered) as implying that the body is a “necessary link” and that neglecting this would explain why a cogito of the existence of others is required in the first place. Nevertheless, such an approach leads to overlooking the order of Sartre’s approach and possibly misinterpreting both the role of the “slightly broadened cogito” in the book and Sartre’s criticism of his own earlier attempt to deal with solipsism.

First, the necessary contingency of the existence of a single consciousness (its *facticity*) is established in the second part of *Being and Nothingness* in the section entitled “The Facticity of the For-itself” where Sartre confronts Descartes’ second “proof of existence God” (considered in the introduction) by pushing it to its limits: “To found its own being it would have to exist at a distance from itself, and that would imply a certain nihilation of the being founded as of the being which founds” (BN, 104). If I could be my own foundation, my becoming such would involve some negations: to have become a being which is how it conceives itself would presuppose that I would have previously not been my own foundation. Thus, “[e]very effort to conceive the idea of a being which would be the foundation of its being leads, despite itself, to form that of a being which, contingent as being-in-itself, would be the foundation of its own nothingness” (BN, 105). The fiction of self-production cannot establish the necessity of its author’s existence. Notably, this reasoning does *not* involve the concept of the body. I suggest that it also calls into question the very requirement of conceiving a *link* between consciousnesses and bodies. This conception is criticized in the section “The Body”, to which Barnes refers:

Consciousness of body is comparable to the consciousness of the *sign*. [...] The consciousness of the sign exists, for otherwise we should not be able to understand its meaning. But the sign is that which is surpassed towards meaning, that which is neglected [to the benefit of sense], that which is never apprehended for itself, that beyond which the look perpetually [directed towards]. Consciousness (of) the body is a lateral and retrospective consciousness of what consciousness is *without having to be it*. (Translation modified, BN, 354)

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<sup>22</sup> “I know my own body not as a piece of In-itself with which I am burdened but as Being-for-itself. Thus to say that I have entered into the world, come to the world, or that there is a world, or that I have a body is one and the same thing” (BN, 318).

In short, as with than the sense of a written proposition, the body should not be reified as the object that a consciousness needs to pass *through* to eventually reach the world and others. Barnes' reading faces the same difficulty as Catalano (Catalano, 2010, p. 35), who suggests that "embodiment should be conceived as a 'primary bond of the body to the world'".

Barnes and Catalano make a similar move: in the absence of a counterpart – the body – which could not be not lacking, consciousness could not be acknowledged as what it is or needs to be. Nevertheless, if there is no such thing as an exclusive perspective, if disembodied standpoints are fictitious, then it may be that there is no need to provide insurance that consciousnesses are embodied, for they could not be disembodied anyway. Sartre suggests sometimes that there is no such thing as a conceivable alternative in this respect anyway: "without facticity consciousness could choose its attachments to the world in the same way as the souls in Plato's *Republic* choose their condition" (BN, 107). In this light, the central import of the reassessment of facticity in the third part could be to bring out that, for a phenomenological account, it matters that it is not only the existence of the for-itself but also the structure of the body which is contingent: "one could easily conceive of bodies which could not take any view on themselves; it even appears that this is the case for certain insects which, although provided with a differentiated nervous system and with sense organs, can not employ this system and these organs to know themselves" (BN, 381).

Therefore, the concept of body does not play a central role in the "slightly broadened cogito" because the contingent character of the concrete perceptions of one's body by an individual (BN, 381) can be understood as the counterpart of the abstract reduction of the body to a unique "immediate object" available to reflection, as Sartre suggests concerning Schopenhauer (BN, 255). Accounting for the fact that Sartre specifically considers the body after addressing the question of solipsism is not of secondary importance in understanding the project of *Being and Nothingness* as a whole.

Briefly put, I suggest and will attempt to show that the "slightly broadened cogito" establishes that the certainty of the existence of others cannot conceivably depend on perception. If I know that someone exists when I perceive that person, it is unclear that there is any need to infer that it is uncertain that the

same person does not exist when I do not perceive her. It is rather in determinate circumstances that a doubt about the existence of others is relevant (e.g., in case we know that someone we know was at some place when some catastrophe happened). To perceive *somebody* is not required in order to know that this person existed.

Second, Barnes formulates the above quoted negative verdict that, as far as reasons and proof are concerned, Sartre is convinced that we can never prove existence of “the Other”, which would contrast with Sartre’s earlier “optimistic” attempt to refute solipsism. Barnes suggests that Sartre grants in *Being and Nothingness* that proof regarding the existence of others could be lacking and will be lacking. That is to say, not only that such proof would be conceivable, but also that it could not be provided, such that solipsism would be irrefutable (e.g., as Schopenhauer and Russell suggest). However, not only does Sartre explicitly spell out that such proof is not required, he also states that it is impossible, which seems to imply, in this case, that strictly speaking, it is inconceivable: that it cannot and need not be provided (BN, 273-274). As Morris suggests:

Commentators exhibit the prejudice in favour of knowledge over certainty when they attempt to reconstruct Sartre’s enterprise in terms of a proof, and equally when they conclude that in fact he is not attempting to prove the existence of others, he is simply assuming it. (Morris, 2008, p. 50)

If the reading I propose is correct, then Sartre does not suggest that he inferred the impossibility of refuting solipsism from the pseudo-failure of his refutation in the *Transcendence*. He rather suggests that the pseudo-need for refuting solipsism stems from the manner in which solutions to the so-called problem of the existence of other minds which rely on would-be proofs will reproduce the difficulty they are meant to solve. Providing an alternative is what I assume Sartre did at his time with “a slightly broadened cogito”, insofar as it is not, strictly speaking, a proof, and that its author explicitly presents it as such.

I preserve the idiom of “mind” when commenting on Sartre due to a specificity of French language, which is the distinction between “*autre*” and “*autrui*”. “*Autre*” is straightforwardly translatable as “other”, but “*autrui*” does not have a straightforward translation in English. The closest is, I suggest, “an other mind” inasmuch as “*autrui*” has no plural in French and can be used as a generic term by which someone can claim something about anyone’s relations to

others while speaking about no one in particular. In French, it is not “*autrui*” but “*autre*” which would be used to speak about a determinate person, as in “the other said that the morning star is the evening star”. “*Autre*” does have a plural in French (*autres*), as in English (“others”). That “*autrui*” is used as a singular term in French generates some difficulties that Sartre attempts to confront by means of using capital letters on certain occasions, as in “if there is an other mind (*Autrui*) in general” (BN, 308). On the reading I propose, in such passages, Sartre is reflecting on the conditions of the intelligibility (rather than possibility) of our respective thoughts and relations. To this extent, it implies both discontinuities and continuities with respect to the philosophical tradition he confronts. Its central discontinuity is that Sartre criticizes the referential use of the idiom of “mind”, along with, as will be considered in section 2.2.3, that of “spirit”. If by “mind” or “spirit” one attempts to refer to one or several entities which would exist distinctly or in addition to “bodies”, then the so-called problem of the relation of mind with body would arise. However, if it is granted that bodiless minds (i.e., ghosts) belong to the register of fiction, it can be underscored that Sartre does not wish to account for the reality of other minds in the same sense. Nevertheless, inasmuch as in virtue of human actions, entities as “bodiless minds” do exist as fictive ones, Sartre explicitly wants to account for them (cf. “‘Doing’ and ‘Having’: Possession”, BN, 596-620). In this sense, Sartre does not want to call into question the continuity of the intelligibility of human actions (e.g., his analysis of burial [BN, 597]). On this approach, someone can judge the explanations provided for given actions as irrelevant, yet accept that such actions have been done. Accordingly, the fact that some events happened is implied by the eventually incompatible explanations we can provide for them. I thus suggest that Sartre treats the question of the existence of other minds and the fictive existence of bodiless ones distinctly. In the tradition that Sartre criticizes there are passages where “mind”, “spirit” and even “consciousness” are treated as referential terms, as if designators of (real or non-abstract) entities, yet on the reading I propose Sartre does not call into question that this tradition was right in presupposing the existence of other minds about whom we think and have feelings, independently of their presence in our surroundings. Consequently, it is not only that not every conception of the mind-body distinction would fall under his criticisms, but also some conceptions of the consciousness-body distinction. Accounting for some distinction in this style matters if we wish to leave intact the intelligibility of some

situations, such as the one of someone affected by “locked-in syndrome”, which obviously is entirely distinct from solipsism. Rather than the idioms of “mind” and “spirit”, Sartre consider their use, inasmuch as they are clues to structural similarities belonging to distinct world-conceptions (*Weltschauung*), a question that will be studied in the first part of the fourth chapter of the present thesis.

This connects to a second point, which regards the importance of the distinction between subject and object in *Being and Nothingness*. Descombes (Descombes, 2014, p. 138) recently formulated the following criticism:

The opening mistake of the classical philosophies of the subject has precisely been to have assimilated the first person to the third one, taking the latter to be a subjective variant of the former, and to seek vainly to identify a subject, the *me*, of which the objective pronoun “me” would be the proper name.

The classical approaches to which Descombes (2014, p. 74) refers (notably including those of Descartes and Schopenhauer) were mistaken in their attempts to locate “a third-person, a moment of objectification, within the first person”, inasmuch as it would be, on these approaches, necessary to grant that talking about oneself amounts to talking about an object that the speaker could identify. These approaches implicitly suggest or explicitly claim that “self-consciousness” should be understood as the identity of the object and the subject of a consciousness. One should first identify oneself as the object that contingently proves to be oneself; one could then, secondly, refer to oneself as such an object inasmuch as there could not be any other. Descombes suggests that Sartre’s early philosophy falls under the criticism that he addresses to the phenomenological school and has its roots in “the opening mistake” of the classical philosophies cited above. The criticism is the following:

If there must be an *alter ego* for me as an *ego*, it is necessary that the egological relation to oneself carries within itself a relation of “alterity” which would make of me, in a sense, another *me* than me. This is the path which has been abundantly took by the phenomenological school. (Descombes, 2014, p. 186)

Descombes could be right concerning both his diagnosis regarding the traditional conceptions of self-consciousness and the difficulties faced by some phenomenologists. However, it seems unclear that this criticism applies to Sartre’s early philosophy for three main reasons. As shown in section 1.2.2, Sartre first criticizes the classical conception of the subject-object distinction, and, second, he distinguishes between self-consciousness and consciousness of objects in a way which does not imply that the former needs to be assimilated to a

version of the later. Thirdly, Sartre explicitly calls into question the very need for the concept of alterity (BN, 638). As an alternative, I attempt to show in this thesis that Sartre already questions what Descombes calls “a moment of objectification” in *Being and Nothingness*. The reading I propose of the “slightly broadened *cogito*” attempts to show that Sartre’s criticism of the unavoidability of solipsism, as brought out by Morris (2008, p. 125), is achieved by the relativizing of the modality under which one can think or refer to someone else as to an object. That is to say, Sartre purports to show that to think to someone else to an object is one modality among others under which we can think of or refer to someone else. The example he provides when introducing the distinction between other-as-object and other-as-subject is that of the feelings of someone with respect to someone else<sup>23</sup>. That is to say, Sartre suggests that thinking of someone else as an object is internally related to feelings with respect to the person being thought about, which is not necessary and misleading if we consider objects in the empirical sense. If that is correct, Sartre makes some room between “objectivation” and “objectification”, by relativizing the modality under which one can think or refer to someone else.

In this light, the aporia of the in-itself and the for-itself at which the introduction ends calls upon the feeling of unavoidable compliance that is the obverse of the assumption that consciousness and world are related externally, or that there could be an gap that only “philosophy of being” could bridge. However, if consciousness and world are in fact related, and if the abstract account seems to call into question the possibility of their relation, then this retrospectively establishes that the corresponding perspective was not necessary, and misleading. Sartre suggests that granting the synthetic character of the relation suffices to obtain a better perspective (BN, 27). If the terms of a synthetic relation are abstractly separated, the recovery of the relation that is analysed might seem impossible. From the perspective of a single concrete and conscious whole in its relation to the world (i.e., a “being-in-the-world”), both “consciousness” and “phenomena” exist abstractly. This solitary whole, which *exists* and of which “consciousness” and “phenomena” are “moments”, is nothing but “the man in the

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<sup>23</sup> This distinction is studied in section 2.2.2.

world with this specific union of the man to the world that Heidegger calls ‘being-in-the-world’” (BN, 28).

To obtain a correct perspective, it thus suffices to invert the abstract approach by internalizing the relation of the human to the world: “the relation of the regions of being is a primitive burst which makes part of the structure of these beings themselves” (BN, 28). Any account of the human in its relation to the world should integrate its visibility. He appeals to a “naïve sight” (i.e., characterized by unreflexive trust with respect to what it is aimed at) in order to interrogate the human-in-the-world as a whole (ibid.). In this approach, it suffices to rely on sight to see a “being-in-the-world” (ibid.). If one’s aim is to account for the human in its relation to the world, then a human-in-the-world necessarily exists concretely as a self-standing whole that can be seen.

In this manner, describing this whole opens the way to answering two internally related questions. The first concerns the identification of the synthetical relation of “being-in-the-world” (*être-dans-le-monde*): “which is the synthetical relation that we will name the being-in-the-world?” (ibid.). The second concerns the requirements of intelligibility that apply to our notions of “world” and “human”: “what must be man and world for this relation to be possible between them?” (ibid.).

In order to account for the internal relation of the human with the world, Sartre proposes studying human attitudes. These could either be taken for “subjective affects”, the meaning of which would somehow only be accessible to the reflexion of one person, or as realities which could be objectively apprehended by several persons. On the condition that they are treated as realities, considering attitudes would suffice to account for the intelligibility of the relation of the human to the world and bring out the requirements which bear on their relation, since all human conduct involves the interplay of man and world.

### 2.1.2. The Interrogative Attitude as a Leading Thread

To address the issue raised by solipsism, Sartre’s first step was to show that granting that the categorical character of the distinction between consciousness and world implies that they are related externally, leads to an aporia. Sartre then proposes that reflexion on the intelligibility of attitudes is sufficient to resolve this aporia. The question which immediately arises from this

is whether there is one particular attitude or conduct whose analysis would enable such a resolution.

For Sartre, the interrogative attitude or interrogative conduct is an adequate “leading thread” (*Fil conducteur*) to pursue the research (BN, 28), insofar as it can be endorsed either voluntarily or unreflexively. To his readers, Sartre suggests that they have already endorsed it while reading and posing the question: “Is there any conduct which can reveal to me the relation of man with world?” (BN, 28). First, this conduct presupposes reflexivity, in that it implies posing a question to oneself. Second, the objectivity of the question does not depend on the identity of the questioner (BN, 28). Third, this question is not reducible to the “objective set of the words drawn on the sheet” (BN, 28), as one may reflexively question the interrogative conduct by asking “what does this attitude reveal to us?” (*ibid.*). Sartre rejects the idea that the “primitive” relation of the questioner with that which is independent from him, or the in-itself (*être-en-soi*), could be one of interrogation. Questions cannot be taken as indicative of a relation beyond which it would be impossible to regress, for linguistic interrogation – a question – supposes that one’s relation to the world holds. This means that the existence of that which is interrogated cannot conceivably be itself called into question, for the very intelligibility of interrogation involves that one stands before that – “the being” – which one interrogates.

The manner in which an interrogation bears on that which is interrogated cannot conceivably be dependent on the questioner alone. Were that the case, the answer could be given by the questioner irrespective of anything else. To interrogate a “being” thus presupposes that the interrogation concerns either a “being” or its ways of being. On the basis of a “preinterrogative familiarity with being” (i.e., one’s relatedness to a being that precedes one’s interrogation), one can pose various questions: “how is ...?”, “is there ...?”, “what is ...?”, etc. Sartre does not specify either a list or a hierarchy of questions. The upshot of his approach is to clarify that to question a “being” can only abstractly be detached from one’s expectations with respect to the “being” that one questions. Questions posed rhetorically or to test someone’s knowledge hardly count as counterexamples, for answers to such questions are not meant to inform the questioner of anything new. Posing such questions instead aims to satisfy other expectations (e.g., suggesting, provoking or testing). Questions may thus be

understood as a variety of expectation. Although not every expectation can be equated with a question, every question involves an expectation. To interrogate a “being” by means of a question amounts to expecting an answer from that “being” in a way that does not solely depend on the questioner.

Sartre thus characterizes a question as the expectation of the “unveiling” of a “being” or a “way of being” against the background of a preinterrogative familiarity with being. Sartre’s use of the idiom “unveiling” can be read as indicating that someone posing a question often intends to dispel a concern (i.e., the obverse of a given expectation). A determinate “veiling” can be understood as a situation of relative ignorance. In some cases, obtaining the answer to my question is what I need, as long as the expectation it presupposes can be satisfied. For example, if I need food, I could express to someone else that I want to know if a box contains food by asking “is there some food in this box?” Obviously, unless that person knows whether there is any food in the box, I would have to open the box to answer this question.

According to this approach, the intelligibility of interrogation as a conduct requires that the answers provided by determinate “unveilings” to satisfy one’s expectations have two opposed modalities. As Sartre puts it, “the answer will either be a yes or a no” (BN, 29). This does not involve taking “yes” and “no” as the only possible answers to questions. Sartre rather provides a way to distinguish the symbol of a question from an affirmation or a negation. For, in the absence of a conceivable distinction between what Sartre characterizes as “two equally objective and contradictory possibilities”, everything would be as if the distinction between a question and its eventual answer was arbitrary.

Conversely, it is inconceivable for a question *not* to admit an alternative between at least two contradictory and objective answers which could be given. These answers must be objective to count as answers to a question concerning a “being”, since they depend on its existence or modes of existence. And the answers must exclude or contradict each other, since they cannot simultaneously be correct answers to the same question. An indeterminate question, the answers to which could not conceivably be foreseen in advance, is not a question at all.

Sartre affirms that it only appears as though some questions, including his earlier one (i.e., “what does this attitude reveal to us?”), do not admit a negative

answer. It is always possible to answer such questions with “nothing”, “nobody” or “never” (ibid.). Conceptions such as Bergson’s,<sup>24</sup> according to which it is a mere illusion to grant that the word “nothing” has any meaning apart from satisfying practical utilitarian expectations, are misleading. On such an account, the idea that a determinate lack could be revealed by endorsing interrogative conduct is nothing but an illusion which arises from confusing the practical utility of a fiction with an alleged metaphysical truth. Sartre’s answer to any such conception is radical: “to call such a conduct a pure fiction, is to hide the negation without removing it” (ibid.). In other words, calling any conduct “a pure fiction” amounts to treating it as *nothing but* a fiction. However, getting rid of negation leads to rejecting the reality of the negative answer that can be obtained by endorsing the interrogative conduct. It is the interrogated “being” which unveils a true negation to the one that interrogates, not the opposite (ibid.). Whether, for example, there is food in a box that I think might contain some cannot conceivably result from a decision on my part.

The permanent and objective possibility of a negative answer is a requisite for the intelligibility of interrogative conduct. This is presupposed, as we shall see, by ordinary deceptions. To grant this does not involve granting any restrictive limit (i.e., a limitation) with respect to knowledge. On the contrary, it amounts to suggesting that there is no such thing as a position of relative ignorance in which one may find oneself and that *a priori* could not be overcome.

Accordingly, if one means one’s question (if the question that is posed is not, for example, rhetorical), then posing it involves being ignorant of its answer. Nevertheless, this ignorance does not involve finding oneself in “a state of indeterminacy”, but rather it means having put oneself in a state of “non-determinacy” (*non-détermination*) (ibid.). Sartre calls this “the non-being of knowledge in man”. Being ignorant of the answer to a question, whatever it might be, means that the answer could be objectively negative in a way that does not depend on its being asked by someone, which Sartre calls “the possibility of non-being in transcendent being”. Whoever poses a question would be ignorant of its answer. Finally, the questioner is not ignorant with respect to any specific answer. Rather, whatever the correct answer to the question, obtaining it would make a

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<sup>24</sup> See Bergson’s “Le possible et le réel” (La Pensée et le Mouvant, 2013) for an overview of his approach on this point and *L’évolution créatrice* (2013, p. 22) for its exemplification.

difference with respect to that which is the case, for obtaining the correct answer introduces a limit: it can only falsely be denied by whoever obtained it. That one found a correct answer is the case if such an event happened, which thereby makes a difference. Sartre calls this “the non-being of limitation,” required by the conceivability of a true answer to a question: to answer a question correctly enables saying “this is thus and not otherwise” (ibid.).

Sartre states that this “triple non-being” (i.e., the questioner’s ignorance of an answer, the objectivity of negative answers, and the limits introduced by true answers) belongs to the conditions of intelligibility of any interrogation, including “metaphysical” interrogation (BN, 29). His approach is inspired by, but also directed against, Heidegger.<sup>25</sup> While Heidegger’s (1996, p. 143) contention is that “what is decisive is not to get out of the circle [of understanding], but to get in it in the right way”, Sartre suggests that accounting for the intelligibility of interrogation is decisive (i.e., allows one to situate oneself), which requires the independence of answers from questioners.

We have seen so far that, in order to solve the aporia of relying on a single categorical distinction between consciousness and world, accounting for the intelligibility of interrogative conduct can suffice to address the issue raised by solipsism. However, now that “metaphysical” interrogation is considered, does this mean that Sartre’s approach is incompatible with the intelligibility of ordinary situations?

A first element of an answer to this is that, by the end of the section on interrogation, the question of the relation of human beings to that which exists independently from consciousness has not been answered. The upshot of the section is, on the contrary, to establish that reflexion on the interrogative attitude cannot conceivably suffice to answer such a question. If it could, then the issue raised by solipsism could not be confronted. Nevertheless, “non-being” now

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<sup>25</sup> The section on “interrogation” is a critical rewriting of Heidegger’s (1996, pp. 4-5) approach to questioning. Sartre’s approach precludes: (i) the possibility of a hierarchy of questions which could precede every conceivable “questioning” (such that there is no such thing as a unique and fundamental question); (ii) that the questioner could be guided by that which is questioned (inasmuch as “questioning” is an activity exercised by someone); (iii) the containment of the “being” that is questioned within the one that is questioned (for the intelligibility of inquiry requires its independence from the questioner); (iv) the equation of “questioning” with the character of “a being” that questions (for, as an attitude, it can be endorsed by anyone).

seems to be a “component” of the real. Does Sartre then suggest that “non-being” should be said “to be” in any sense?

The answer cannot be positive, since Sartre suggests that, as an attitude, interrogation precedes judgement. Interrogation also precedes its linguistic expression: questions expressed linguistically involve the intelligibility of interrogation as a conduct, rather than the opposite. For example, if my car breaks down, I can visually interrogate its engine by looking (BN, 31). If I interrogate a mechanic concerning the engine of my car, the mechanic will in turn interrogate the parts of its engine. In any case, what is expected from the interrogation is not a judgment, but the unveiling of a being which will eventually provide a basis for judgment (BN, 32). However, insofar as I *do* expect the unveiling of a being, I am thereby prepared for the unveiling of non-being. For example, if I am inspecting the carburettor to determine whether it had a role in the breakdown of my car, I am prepared to grant that it may not have had a role (*ibid.*). “Non-being” thus designates the non-holding of a possibility contextually considered by someone: “non-being always appears in the limits of a human expectation” (BN, 31).

So conceived, “non-being” amounts to that which is presupposed by a negative judgment which fixes an anterior discovery (BN, 33). For example, suppose that I am late to a meeting with Pierre in a café. Given that Pierre is very punctual, I ask myself: “Will Pierre have waited for me?” At the café, I realize that he is not there. Sartre claims that this absence is intuited. He grants that it might seem absurd to speak of intuiting an absence, but he emphasises that ordinary statements, such as “I immediately saw that he was not there”, can be considered as testifying to such intuitions. To account for it, he argues that “within perception, there is always a constitution of a form on a background” (BN, 34). This means that the distinction between form and background is relative to the direction of one’s attention and therefore reversible: relative to one’s expectation and attention, a form in the foreground may coalesce with forms in the background that are not differentiated; conversely, that which is not differentiated in the background could be differentiated as a form in the foreground.

Sartre uses this distinction to establish the objectivity of negative facts.<sup>26</sup> If the judgment that “Pierre is not in this café” can be grounded at all, if it conveys any relevant truth, it must differ from ones like “Wellington is not in this café, neither is Paul Valéry”, etc. Thus, the intuition of absence requires its relative independence from the one who notices it. As such, anyone who expected to see Pierre in that café could have noticed his absence. Sartre’s account implies two “nihilations”: the two internal ontological negations involved in unveiling a situation to someone.

The first nihilation is the obverse of the unveiling of a situation to someone. Given a determinate expectation (e.g., seeing Pierre), anything that could be contextually differentiated belongs to the background, which is not seen as a differentiated object. Rather, it is “the object of a purely marginal attention” (BN, 34). If they do not satisfy my expectation, forms are momentarily differentiated before they merge back to the undifferentiated background.

To say that none of the forms which can be differentiated in the background satisfy my expectation (e.g., if Pierre is not in the café), does not imply that I have discovered the absence of a form (e.g., the figure of Pierre) which could satisfy my expectation *somewhere* (e.g., in any part of the café). Rather, given a determinate background (e.g., the café), this form is absent everywhere (i.e., Pierre is absent from the whole café). The background as a whole remains without any satisfactory and differentiated form in the foreground. This is the second nihilation and the obverse of the unsatisfactory unveiling – with respect to my expectation – of all contextually available and potentially relevant forms.

Sartre affirms that this double-nihilation is the basis for the judgment that “Pierre is not here” and for the distinction between internal and external negations. That one’s judgement can be true or false presupposes that one is evaluating an objective fact (here: Pierre is not in the café). The absence of Pierre, as a discovery that I made against the yardstick of my expectation to meet him in the café, implies my concrete relation to the situation. In other words, insofar as a relevant background is unveiled to me, I can judge that someone is not somewhere. Without such context, conceivable negations, such as “Wellington is

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<sup>26</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter, Wittgenstein introduces a similar notion in the *Tractatus*.

not in this café”, are gratuitous, groundless and inefficient. As such, negative judgments are “conditioned and supported by non-being”, rather than the opposite (BN, 35). This is required for the intelligibility of ordinary deceptions, which retrospectively brings out why Sartre – unlike Kant – assumed that a “leading thread” had to be chosen. Thus, the outcome of the analysis of interrogative conduct is twofold. First, accounting for the intelligibility of the interrogative conduct suffices to render explicit the internal character of the relation between consciousness and world. Second, endorsing the interrogative conduct suffices to note whether the fact of the presence of a given individual in a place holds.

### 2.1.3. The Issue of the “Mineness” of the World

We have seen that dissolving the aporia of the for-itself and the in-itself requires accounting for the intelligibility of one’s ability to situate oneself in the world by endorsing interrogative conduct. Nevertheless, to address the issue raised by solipsism, it is necessary to establish that reflexive consideration of the immediate structures of consciousness (their “empty consideration”) is not sufficient to account for the intelligibility of self-consciousness. In order to do so, I will now turn to Sartre’s analysis of the immediate structures of consciousness.

Here, Sartre turns from reflexive description of the being-in-the-world to ontological description of the “instantaneous nucleus” of such a being’s consciousness (BN, 94). He first isolates the empty unity of immediate (and pre-reflexive) structures of consciousness as “presence to self”, which is an ontological ground of consciousness. As considered in part 1.2.2., Sartre criticizes approaches according to which “plenitude of existence” is the aim of philosophy. To criticize the “quest for being” that is the obverse of such approaches, he suggests that “the law of being of the *for-itself*, [...] is to be oneself under the form of a presence to self” (translation modified, BN, 101). On the conceptions criticized by Sartre, it would suffice to assume that reflexion involves “presence to a self” or being “present to oneself”. The (reflexive) “principle of identity”, formulated as “A is A” (BN, 98), would then immediately suffice to account for self-consciousness.

That which Sartre calls the “instantaneous nucleus” of consciousness is constituted by a contingent presence aimed at value or “self” (BN, 117) whose absence constitutes it as a possible. This “nucleus” is not the exclusive property of

a consciousness. Is it thereby incompatible with the singularity of a consciousness? The intelligibility of the possibility that consciousness constitutively lacks seems to lead to a disjunction of the relation of the for-itself with the world. If, in one sense, nothing separates one's "presence to self" from a projected "presence to self", in another sense it is the world as the totality of being which separates the present from the projected "presence to self" (BN, 125-126). To itself, the isolated "nucleus" seems to be its own obstacle, as if the public character of the structure of consciousness could forbid its individuality.

Sartre then defines anew the relation of the for-itself with the possible as "the circuit of ipseity" and the totality of being, inasmuch as it is traversed by the circuit of ipseity as "world" (BN, 126). He reapplies the procedure of inversion by which the aporia of the introduction was solved by, this time, internalizing the internal relation of the for-itself with the possibility that it constitutively lacks. This is because the relation of the for-itself to the possible (i.e., to a situated space of possibilities) is not external. There is no such thing as a possible without a for-itself, nor a for-itself without a possible: "the possible is [that which is lacked] by the for-itself *in order to be itself*" (translation modified, BN, 126).

By developing the central conclusion of *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre here suggests that the individuality of consciousness precludes it being a result of one's *possession* of an Ego (BN, 127). As a pole which unifies experiences (*Erlebnisse*), the Ego coincides with itself. However, this coincidence of the Ego with itself is not compatible with the necessity that consciousness cannot coincide with itself. It is also incompatible with "the mode of being of the 'I'", for "the consciousness I have of the 'I' never exhausts it" (BN, 127). The "I" is given to consciousness as "having been there before consciousness – and at the same time possessing depths which have to be revealed gradually" (BN, 127). If, in spite of everything, consciousness is conceived as a "pure reference to the Ego as to its self", it means that the being of the for-itself is confused with its hypostasis, supposedly in order to avoid the risk that the for-itself could be pure "impersonal" contemplation.

But neither the Ego nor the self is required as a possession in order to account for the individuation of consciousness. The strict contingency of an existence can be distinguished from the contingent necessity of its abstract ontological grounding, the "presence to self". Concretely, it is not whatever

positional consciousness of the world that is pre-reflexively nihilated by whatever “reflexive” consciousness. Abstractly, the “presence to self” results from the internal ontological negation of a *determinate* positional consciousness of the world. Furthermore, the self does not “inhabit” consciousness, as it is necessarily lacked by the for-itself (i.e., the ideal or limit which is always absent from it). Finally, the very constitution of an Ego as the sign of a personality would be rendered unintelligible, for if it always coincided with itself, it could not be constituted at all.

Sartre then distinguishes between two aspects of the concept of person: the pure presence to oneself of the “pre-reflexive cogito”, which is the immediate grasp of the existent by itself; and ipseity, or the mediate grasp of the existent by itself through the world. The person can then be conceived as a “free relation to itself”: a non-constraining relation between a (present) “presence to self” and a “presence to self” projected in order to coincide with itself. This relationship characterizes a person as much when it is assumed as when it is avoided. This is the sense in which ipseity is circular: the trajectory of consciousness is fixed in advance because, whether or not it attempts to coincide with itself, projecting this or that presence to oneself characterizes it solely for itself.

To internalize the relation of the possible with consciousness requires determining anew the concept of world, previously defined as the totality of beings as traversed by the circuit of ipseity (BN, 126). The concept of world is characterized anew as the totality of beings insofar as they exist inside the circuit of ipseity (BN, 128). In reflexion, the presence to oneself in the world appears to be the circuit within which the world is revealed. As the necessary obstacle between a determinate “presence to self” and a projected one, the world is “mine”: “without the world, no ipseity, no person; without ipseity, without the person, no world” (translation modified, BN, 128).

Sartre is notably discreet concerning what he calls “the me” in a section titled “The me and the circuit of ipseity” (*Le moi et le circuit de l'ipséité*). He only writes: “of the I [...] we will say that it is the ‘me’ of consciousness, but not that one is its own *self*” (BN, 127). However, if admitting that the world is mine seems to exclude the possibility that consciousness can belong to no one, it now seems impossible to encounter anyone else in the world. The “mineness” (*moiïté*) of the world, which is *never* posed in unreflexive consciousness of the world, belongs to

the *structure* of the for-itself (ibid.). If the totality of beings is the circuit through which I discover myself, then outside of this circuit there is no one to encounter, for it would be paradoxical that there could be several structures if a single one suffices to realize oneself. To grant this would involve there being a concrete totality which does not belong to the totality of beings, inasmuch as the totality of beings is that which can “discover itself” through the circuit of ipseity. This would entail that the totality of beings is not a totality. The price to pay in order to demonstrate the public character of the structure of the human in relation to world seems to be that the human cannot conceivably admit a public.

This tension is central to Sartre’s approach to the issue of solipsism in the third part of *Being and Nothingness*. Nevertheless, at this stage in the book, one can question whether the internalization of temporality or transcendence to the reflexive approach to the immediate (or unladen) structures of consciousness could suffice to account for self-consciousness. To establish that this cannot be the case is thus required.

Sartre first considers temporality. Accounting for temporality is required, for as a “rejection of contingency”, or as “grounding its own nothingness”, solitary consciousness (“for-itself”) *lasts* (BN, 172). The very distinction between a present and projected “presence to self” requires temporality. Nevertheless, such a distinction does not mean that the internal ontological negation (“the nihilation”) of an isolated consciousness is *achieved* (that it is “a given”) (BN, 172). This would mean that a solitary consciousness could not fail to accomplish itself through the flight that is its non-thetic obverse. As such, if anything is demonstrated by considering temporality, it is that the temporalizing of consciousness is never achieved:

The time of consciousness, it is human reality which temporalizes itself as a totality which is to itself its own incompleteness, it is nothingness slipping itself within a totality as a detotalizing ferment. (ibid.)

Reflexion on psychic temporality at best provides an *a priori* “description” of the Ego (BN, 184). Attempting to resolve the tension involved in the “mineness” of the world by means of reflexive consciousness amounts to an attempt to think about oneself on the basis of one’s “shadow” (BN, 193). This is not to say that one’s “psychic world” cannot be real, for reflexion can provide that which Sartre calls “mobiles” for action (“mobiles” are similar to “motives” except that their significance is assumed at this stage to be intelligible only via “reflexive”

consciousness [BN, 458-460]). As an example, Sartre underlines that someone could affirm that one will not meet with someone “because” of one’s antipathy towards that person. To select a reflexive “mobile” which has its source in one’s psychic world in an attempt to avoid a lack of justification is possible. However, Sartre emphasizes that considering one’s reflexive “mobiles” thetically does not allow one to consciously consider one’s situation with respect to others: “the for-itself sees itself almost as bestowing an outside on its own eyes, but this outside is purely virtual” (BN, 193).

Thus, like reflexion on temporality, reflexion on transcendence does not solve the tension raised by the “mineness” of the world. Sartre returns to the initial problem (BN, 194) of the original relation of human reality to what he calls the “being of phenomena” or “being-in-itself” (BN, 28). He suggests that his earlier insight – “the profound meaning of the for-itself as the foundation of its own nothingness” (BN, 195) – can account for the internal relation between knowledge and being. Thus, knowledge can be understood as a type of internal relation between “the for-itself” and “the in-itself” which neither creates nor adds anything to being (i.e., which cannot transform anything that exists) (BN, 197). We saw that Sartre sided with Husserl’s approach to intentionality (“every consciousness is consciousness of something”). Sartre suggests that to account for the determinacy of the negation between someone and something (i.e., things that one can point to and know about) is sufficient to account for the intelligibility of knowledge of things:

The thing, before all comparison, before all construction, is that which is present to consciousness as *not being* consciousness. The original relation of presence as the foundation of knowledge is negative. (BN, 197)

One’s situated presence to something that one knows about presupposes that one’s epistemic relation to that thing can be reflexively considered in two senses. On the one hand, if one has any knowledge about that which is unveiled to one on a given occasion, this could mean that this knowledge depends on oneself to the exclusion of someone else (which would involve renouncing the intelligibility of knowledge). Any consciousness can learn as every other about some given thing. On the other hand, it is *to* someone that something is unveiled, and the determinate unveiling of something to someone thus depends on the presence of someone to something. Sartre suggests that accounting for the

determinacy of the internal relation between a consciousness and that which is unveiled to it when present to some given thing suffices to solve this tension. Sartre's central insight is that knowing something is to *realize* in the twofold sense of "making" (e.g., when one acts to realize a project) and "gaining consciousness of" (e.g., when one realizes the extent of a catastrophe): "the real is realization" (BN, 203). Sartre calls "transcendence" the determinate internal negation, defining it as "that internal and realizing negation which reveals the in-itself while determining the being of the for-itself" (BN, 203). By non-thetically negating one's immediate "presence to self" in order to answer a question that one poses to oneself about a thing, a consciousness can realize whatever it is that one can know about that thing.

The relation of "the for-itself" and "being" may thus be interrogated afresh. Asking to "which" being the for-itself is "present" is misleading, for the intelligibility of one's question requires that it is posed in a world (BN, 203). It is against the background of a given presence to being that a solitary consciousness can focus on this or that being. Nevertheless, this does not involve a solitary consciousness that is present to "all being" because the realization that beings belong to a whole involves the (totalizing) activity of someone:

A totality indeed supposes an internal relation of being between the terms of a quasi-multiplicity in the same way that a multiplicity supposes – in order to be that multiplicity – an inner totalizing relation among its elements. In this sense, addition itself is a synthetic act. (BN, 203)

The result of the analysis of temporality is that the for-itself constitutes itself as "detotalized totality" (BN, 172, 187). The detotalized character of this totality precludes that to be for-itself, a consciousness needs the whole of being in order to realize its presence to all being (BN, 203). To linguistically point to anything by means of "this" involves the world – "the internal ontological relation of thises" – as the concrete basis for each singular perception. It is thus internal to the world as the complete whole of being that is unveiled through particular things to a solitary consciousness.

However, one's realization that beings belong to a whole is the obverse of the manner in which a solitary consciousness conceives its presence to beings and according to which one "has to be [...] one's own totality as a detotalized totality" (translation modified, BN, 204). Being stands before a solitary consciousness as all that it is not: "original negation, indeed is radical negation" (BN, 204).

Nevertheless, this totalizing by the for-itself, by which the world is unveiled as its “own whole”, does not modify being any more than counting objects modifies what they are. All that it unveils is the manner in which “there is some being” that seems to escape the reach of a solitary consciousness while determining that consciousness in one’s being (ibid.). In this passage, Sartre criticizes Heidegger’s conception of “the nothing”. Although he grants that “knowledge is the world”, he nevertheless rejects that “the nothing” can be conceived as an “environment” amidst which human reality could emerge (or as the empty region into which the world would “hang” or “be suspended”) (ibid.).<sup>27</sup> In order to do this, Sartre distinguishes “nothingness” from “the nothing”. Nothingness “frames” and “supports” the world while it is apprehended as a whole. The singular nothingness of a solitary consciousness is what determines the whole as such by leaving “the absolute nothing outside of the whole”. Yet the totalizing of being by a solitary consciousness does not add anything which could enable its grasp to *exceed* that to which the solitary consciousness is present in a situation. Sartre thus suggests that the apprehension of nothingness as a limit of being is the obverse of human reality when dealing with nothing (*en commerce avec le rien*). As considered earlier, neither nothingness nor limits can be said “to be” in any sense. This points to an additional aspect of the for-itself: the for-itself is not limited by “the nothing”, it is limited by nothing.

Thus, on Sartre’s approach, the internalization of temporality or transcendence within the reflexive approach to the immediate (or unladen) structures of consciousness cannot suffice to account for self-consciousness.

## 2.2. The Aporia of the Relation of my Consciousness to that of the Other

In this section, I argue that on Sartre’s approach, except in some determinate circumstances (e.g., while writing fiction), linguistically calling the existence of others into question amounts to denying the existence of others. The

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<sup>27</sup> Sartre’s criticism of Heidegger is close to that of Wittgenstein: “anyone who speaks of the opposition of being and the nothing, and of the nothing as something primary in contrast to negation, has in mind, I think, a picture of an island of being which is being washed by an infinite ocean of the nothing” (Wittgenstein & Friedrich Waismann, 2003, p. 71).

existence of others cannot and does not require proof. On the contrary, proving the existence of others is inconceivable. Once the theoretical problem of the existence of others is resolved, there remains only a “sort of *de facto* solipsism”: that is to say, an attitude of indifference with respect to others, as a counterpart of the pre-reflexive attempt to appropriate the freedom of others.

I first argue in section 2.2.1 that the theoretical problem of the existence of others can be resolved if its resolution is not assimilated to proving the existence of others. Instead, it suffices to start from contingent or factual necessity, to distinguish others from objects, and to account for the internal character of the relation between others and oneself considered in the objective mode (as “me”). In section 2.2.2., I argue that the “Cogito a little expanded” proposed by Sartre is a conceptual means to render explicit the indubitability of the existence of others. Then, in section 2.2.3., I argue that attempting to take a point of view on the unique whole where are extensionally located internally related consciousnesses is senseless. To this extent, it is misleading to suppose that a point of view on the whole can or cannot be taken. In section 2.2.4., I argue that once the theoretical problem of the existence of others is resolved, there remains only a “sort of *de facto* solipsism”, consisting of the appropriation of an attitude of indifference. As a concretely but unreflexively endorsed attitude, it is nobody’s attitude. Finally, in section 2.2.5., I argue that the gesture that is characteristic of the linguistic expression of solipsism is the pretence to draw a restrictive limit to our thoughts.

### 2.2.1. The Conditions for a Theory of the Existence of Others

At the end of the first two parts of *Being and Nothingness*, everything is as if the possibility that there could be several persons and a unique world would depend on a condition: to account for the unicity of the structure of consciousness involves certainty of the existence of a single detotalized totality. But if there is only one structure of this type, then there can be only one world which would belong to the only person there would be. This makes it seem as though the existence of other persons could not really be admitted without having to renounce to the unicity of the structure of consciousness.

The second step of Sartre’s approach is to show that this tension stems from the assumption that a single categorical distinction between one’s

consciousness and the consciousnesses of others suffices to account for the intelligibility of self-consciousness. Indeed, according to criticized approaches, one's consciousness would be related to that of others only externally. However, this assumption has for counterpart to render mysterious the intelligibility of some experiences. The consideration of this difficulty opens the third part of *Being and Nothingness*.

At this point, Sartre draws the reader's attention to consciousnesses whose intelligibility requires acknowledging existence of others by considering the example of shame (BN, 245). Someone else (*Autrui*) appears to one on some occasions as an indispensable mediator between "I" and "myself": it would be impossible for me to be conscious of my shame (*moi honteux*) without acknowledging it *before* someone else. On such occasions, I am ashamed because I acknowledge how I appear to someone else. Sartre here rejects the idea that shame has a primarily reflexive origin: it is by nature acknowledgement, that is to say, it comprises the immediate resumption of consciousness on a given occasion when I am such as I appear to someone else in a way which affects me. The recognition of the meaning of one's past action on such occasions (that on reflexion I consider retrospectively) does not involve any model or table of correspondence. In reflexion, the intelligibility of vulgarity implies an "intermonadic relation" which implies that one is internally related to someone else (BN, 246). One's feeling ashamed involves one's feeling as such before another person. To account for the "nucleus" of an isolated consciousness, of its empty immediate structures, it previously seemed sufficient to account for the structure of consciousness. Now it appears that "I need [another mind] to seize fully the structures of my being" (translation modified, BN, 247).

Indeed, that the existence of others is implicitly involved in consciousness seems inconceivable inasmuch as the abstract problem of the existence of others or other minds is considered secondary in contrast with consciousness of the existence of the world. But if it can be established that, even from a theoretical perspective from which the generalized absence of others could allegedly be noted, it is absurd that others could lack, then, the theoretical difficulty posed by solipsism will be solved.

In order to dispel any abstractly conceivable doubt with respect to the existence of others, Sartre specifies four conditions as necessary and sufficient for any adequate theory of the existence of others:

1. A theory of the existence of others should not propose a new proof of the existence of others or a better argument against solipsism (BN, 273-274). If one should reject solipsism, it is because it is impossible: “[no one] is truly solipsistic” (translation modified, BN, 274). Abstract doubt with respect to the existence of someone else should not be rejected (for, in given circumstances, it could be relevant). Furthermore, that such doubt is conceivable constitutes the difference between that which is fictive in solipsism from that which is not: “In short, [the existence of another mind] can not be a probability” (translation modified, BN, 274). Sartre characterizes a probability as a possibility whose eventual truth presupposes having obtained means for confirmation. His example is that of life on Mars. In absence of means to verify such a hypothesis, it is nothing but a conjecture. By contrast, the existence of someone else cannot be a probable hypothesis. There is no such thing as an instrument which could reveal new facts that would induce me to affirm or reject it (BN, 275). To dispel the doubt with respect to the existence of someone else requires a *cogito*: that is, a conceptual means for interrogating oneself in order to explicate the grounding of the certainty regarding the existence of others or other minds.
2. It is necessary to start from the Cartesian *cogito*: that is to say, from factual, contingent necessity (BN, 274). It is an indubitable fact that I cannot doubt that I exist, although I can write, without being able to think it, that “I doubt my own existence”. Similarly, someone else’s existence should be discovered through the concrete and indubitable presence of a concrete other. Therefore, it is not a “thinking substance”, but the “for-itself”, an interiority without substance, that is to be re-examined.
3. That which the *cogito* must reveal is not someone else as an object (*objet-autrui*) (BN, 275). To think of someone else as *primarily* an object is to reduce their existence to a probability. But the probable existence of an object does not commit one to anything more than the congruency, the agreement or

convenience, of our representations. Yet, someone else is not a representation, a system of representations, or the necessary unity of our representations. Someone else is not primarily an *object*. Accordingly, the existence of someone else should not only concern us as a constitutive factor of our knowledge of the world and ourselves; it must also be able to concretely “interest” us. Sartre here draws attention to two senses of “interest”. On the one hand, an interest can be felt by someone standing before something else (as before a work of art, in which case one’s attention would be drawn to the object of interest). On the other hand, an interest can also compromise someone (as in business, where one’s interests would refer to one’s commitments).

4. Finally, “[another mind] must appear to the cogito as not being me” (translation modified, BN, 276). Sartre’s aim is to address what Descartes attempted with the “proof through the idea of perfection”. To do so, he distinguishes two ways to conceive the negation between me and someone else: as an external negation, separating one substance from another; or as an internal negation, a “synthetic and active connection of two terms, each one of which constitutes itself by denying that it is the other” (BN, 276). It needs to be shown that it is inconceivable that the negation between me and someone else could be external. To suppose the contrary would amount to renouncing the intuitive character of this negation and thereby the certainty it can provide (BN, 195).

These are the necessary and sufficient conditions for an adequate theory of the existence of others that would dispel any abstractly conceivable doubt with respect to the existence of others. We thus may turn to the theory of the existence of others proposed by Sartre, explored in the section of *Being and Nothingness* entitled “The look”.

#### 2.2.2. A “Cogito a Little Expanded”

As mentioned in the first chapter (part 1.1.1.), Sartre criticizes the approaches of both Watson and Husserl: Watson, insofar as there could be no

such thing as a seeing someone, only a behaving organism, from the behaviourist “platform”; Husserl because, although seeing someone would be conceivable, others’ existence could fall under “phenomenological reduction”.

To point out the common blind spot of these doctrines, Sartre starts from a situation compatible with the world-seen-under-reduction as conceived by methodological solipsism. He grants that it is possible to see someone else as an object: “at least one the modalities of the presence of someone else to me is objectness (*objectité*)” (BN, 276). Imagine that one is in a park and observes someone reading. I see a “reading-man” as a particular object (BN, 278). This man looks at me. It is then undeniable that someone else sees me and that he sees a being which is not solely an object: “someone else would not look at me as he looks at the lawn” (translation modified, BN, 279). If I can see someone else as an object, I can be seen as an object by someone else: the one who sees can be seen. The relation “being-seen-by-someone-else” is, to this extent, an irreducible and necessary fact. It designates a concrete and everyday relation coinciding with the original relation of myself to someone else. Someone else is in principle “the one who looks at me” (BN, 280).

This does not suggest that the look is somehow “attached” to a determinate place in perceptual field (*ibid.*). One can try to avoid being seen by others without knowing determinately from where one could be seen, as during a military operation. Conversely, one may fail to be touched by a look, as when I look at the *eyes* of someone else. Sartre puts into relief a notable disjunction between one’s perception of the world and one’s awareness that one is seen: either I perceive the world (i.e., the eyes of someone else, which then appear to one as “mere presentations” or “put-off-circuit”) or I am conscious of being looked at. Similarly, either I look at the eyes of someone else or I look at someone else. Conversely, to realize that a look is directed towards me is not to apprehend mediately an object in the world but to realize immediately that I am being looked at by someone. It is not the coincidence of someone within a locality which explains the meaning of “the look”: “what I immediately know when I hear branches cracking behind me, is not that *there is someone*, it is that I am vulnerable” (BN, 282). On such occasions, I realize that I am immediately present to someone who may reach me and eventually hurt me.

Underlining the factual necessity of “being-seen-by-the-someone-else” does not suffice to establish that the reduction of the existence of someone else

to a probability is a fiction. What is further required is to show that the certainty of someone else's existence is indubitable, and that their relation to me is internal. Analysing the example of the peeper will satisfy these conditions (BN, 284). This involves imagining a situation where it is undeniable that I am the conscious author of my acts: "imagine that I came to, by jealousy, interest, vice, to put my ear against a door, to look through the whole of a lock" (ibid.). Sartre here uses the results of the second part of the examination of the immediate structures of consciousness. On such an occasion, I am not thetically conscious of myself: nothing troubles my consciousness due to the nihilation of my ipseity while I am peeping. Sartre then considers what happens when the non-thetical nihilation of my ipseity is interrupted by someone: "But all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me! What does this mean?" (BN, 285).

By comparison with the examination of consciousness in solitude, according to which the "me" can occupy only reflexive consciousness, one's objective apprehension of oneself now haunts unreflexive consciousness. In other terms, Sartre now underscores that one can gain consciousness of the fact of the unreflexive character of one's action, even if one's action was not reflexively posited as such beforehand. Far from being conscious of "me" as an object for myself, I am conscious of "me" as an object for someone else. The connection of my pre-reflexive consciousness to my seen-Ego is not reducible to a relation of knowledge, but characterizes a being: "I am, beyond any knowledge that I can have, [that 'me'] that [another mind] knows" (translation modified, BN, 285). Moreover, my Ego is not an object for me which could become unattainable (BN, 284). Rather, reaching it is excluded in principle, in the present but also in the future: "I apprehend it *as not being for me* and since on principle it exists for the other" (ibid.). It will never "belong" to me, since it is not my property. It is not a "bad portrait" (BN, 246) or a "strange image" (BN, 284) that someone else could have done of me. Discovered in shame (or pride), the Ego is present to one "as a me that I am without knowing it" (translation mine, BN, 285).

Shame may thus be understood as recognition. To feel ashamed on some occasion is the tacit recognition that I was *as someone else saw me* (BN, 246; 284). Thus, "[m]y shame is [an avowal]" (translation modified, BN, 287): on reflexion, if I do not acknowledge that I was as someone else saw me, I commit myself to denying that to which the feeling of shame testifies (which is determined circumstantially). Whether this avowal is expressed or not is independent of this

testimony. That it is possible to attempt to mask one's shame by bad faith counts as an additional testimony to my implicit acknowledgement. The way in which someone else is given to my consciousness is not that of objectness (i.e., the modality of consciousness of an object). That I catch the look of someone else excludes that I do so as an object. Like me, someone else is in the world in one's singular relation to it: the world of someone else is similar to mine. These worlds cannot communicate in the sense that realizing that someone else sees me in the world is to realize that someone sees me in the exact way in which I cannot see myself. The way that someone else sees me "escapes" me in the sense that, under reduction, it seems that there could be no such thing as a decision which could be taken with respect to how I relate to someone else.

Thus, it is not initially in the mode of objectness that I see someone else, since they are for me the being *for whom* I am an object. Someone else is the being through which I acquire my "object-ness" and allows me to realize that I can be seen as an object (BN, 284). The counterpart of one's acknowledgment of being seen by someone else as an object is the alienation of one's world (i.e., given such acknowledgment, the world which is structurally mine ceases to be so). This does not mean that someone else determines me in all respects, but that he reveals to me the limits of my freedom (BN, 285). This implies that I can learn of my possibilities from the outside, as when someone forbids me to move by threatening me with a weapon (BN, 287). My possibilities can, accordingly, "subtly die". It is not that my possibilities could prove not to be possibilities any longer, but that I implicitly acknowledge that any act committed against someone else may in principle be used by someone else as an instrument against me, such that not all possibilities are equally relevant (BN, 288). Parallel to this case, in the world-seen-under-reduction, I acknowledge that, outside of myself, my possibility of acting in such and such a way is nothing but a probability.

The intelligibility of subjective reactions, such as shame (BN, 246; 284-286), fear (BN, 286-287) and the "recognition of my slavery" understood as the feeling of being alienated from all of one's possibilities (BN, 291-292), thus requires one's implicit acknowledgement of the existence of someone else. The modification felt when someone else interrupts me is not merely epistemic (BN, 292). Sartre describes this as the entrance of a consciousness in a new dimension of existence, which is non-revealed, on the occasion of a "solidification" and

“stratification” of itself. Via reflexion on one’s relation to oneself at the occasion of being seen, one’s consciousness discovers that it is engaged with itself in a relationship in which it constitutes two terms: on the one hand, one’s “me” (*moi*) as a for-itself which cannot coincide with itself; on the other, one’s “me” that cannot be unveiled to it, which is beyond its range, its action, its knowledge (BN, 292; 306). At this moment, a consciousness apprehends itself as petrified without knowing its identity or place.

We thus see that the primary modality under which someone else is given to me upon my being seen is not objectness: that I see the look of someone else excludes that I can intuit someone else as an object. Far from being an “object” of my attention, in the world seen-under-reduction, I do not turn my attention to others. As someone else comes to me through an encounter, my attention could not have been intentionally directed towards someone to constitute or recognize them beforehand (BN, 293). That someone else’s presence to me is even more pressing when they catch me off guard is the best testimony of the independent existence of others. Yet, seen-under-reduction, someone else’s individual and concrete presence, when I intuit that someone’s look is directed at me, is “the destruction of all objectivity for me”.

At this stage, someone else is present to me as another transcendence in the absence of any mediation (BN, 294). The world escapes me in an absolute manner when I realize that I am seen by someone else:

[Another mind] (*autrui*) is first the being for whom I am an object, that is, the being *through whom* I gain my object-ness. If I am able to conceive of even one of my properties in the objective mode, then [another mind] is already given. (Translation modified, BN, 294)

“Common sense” (*Bon sens*) resistance to solipsistic arguments can now be explicated: certain forms of consciousness testify that someone else is given to me as a concrete and obvious presence (BN, 295). I do not bring others out of myself. It is impossible that someone else could fall under “phenomenological reduction” or be put-off-the-game at will (BN, 295-297). Were consciousness and the freedom of someone else given, they would be known and I would cease to be an object. But they are not: it is a relation of being and knowledge (BN, 297). This is not to say that seeing someone as an object is impossible. Returning to the opening example, Sartre underlines that the page of the book that is read by someone and that I do not see is, in principle, accessible. But if the face of the

person who reads the book is seen by me as the page of the book one reads, then the concept of others has been fixed as an “empty form” in order to *relativize* my pre-reflexive awareness of my lack of attention to others. Thus, I can see someone else as an object, but insofar as I do not see that someone else is looking at me, my avoidance escapes no one but myself:

Just as my consciousness apprehended by the *cogito* bears indubitable witness of itself and of its own existence, so certain particular consciousnesses – for example, “shame-consciousness” – bear indubitable witness to the *cogito* both of themselves and of the existence of [an other mind]. (Translation modified, BN, 297)

But if the fact that there is someone else is incontestable, it must still be granted that it is only probably that someone else looks at me (BN, 299). Sartre may treat anew his earlier examples: I could deceive someone else if I knew, unbeknownst to the other person, from where I could be seen, such as during a military operation when I attempt – with others – to take a group of soldiers by surprise. I could also deceive myself by asking myself whether someone sees me in a situation in which I do not see from where I would be seen (e.g., if I hear someone’s footsteps behind me, I could wonder whether someone is looking at me). I may thus be the author of my own deception with respect to someone else. But is there any conceivable sense in which we could not see each other while face to face, insofar as I could believe to be seen without being so? Could I not be deceiving myself systematically with respect to the existence of someone else? Could the “look” of someone else be only probable (BN, 299)?

The question has nothing but heuristic value insofar as its results from a confusion between what Sartre calls two “distinct orders of knowledge” and two “incomparable types of beings” (BN, 300). On the one hand, the knowledge of being looked at by someone is *certain*: insofar as I am conscious that someone is looking at me, I unreflexively know that they exist. On the other, the knowledge of our being as objects is only *probable*: insofar as I am aware that we exist contingently, I pre-reflexively know that any other person may cease to exist. The alleged possibility that our respective knowledge of each other as “objects” could be certain can thus be dismissed: “we have always known that the knowledge of the object-in-the-world is only probable” (BN, 300).

However, far from reducing one’s possibility of being-seen to a probability, its independence from the body of someone else renders clear that the appearance of certain objects in the field of my experience, particularly the

eyes of someone else, is the “pure occasion” of realizing one’s being-seen (ibid.). It is thus misleading to reduce the possibility of a false alert, the mistaken belief that someone saw me, to the absence of my being as an object (*être-objectif*) for someone else (BN, 300). Although no one is in my surroundings, I can start feeling that someone could be anywhere. My shame can accordingly persist despite the fact that I note the concrete absence of anyone else. Sartre presents that which is unreflexively involved in a false alert as *facticity of the other*, the *contingent* connection of someone else to an object of my world (BN, 300). The object of doubt is not the facticity of others, but the being-there (*l’être-là*) of someone else, the concrete historical event of one’s presence as I become aware of someone else’s presence at a certain occasion. To this extent, what Sartre calls the “original” (*originelle*) presence of someone else in the world is not itself conceivably absent, but transcendent. But how can absence then be conceived?

Someone’s absence requires its determination by someone else from a place where their presence was or could have been noted (ibid.). Absence is not a “*nothingness of links*” of someone to a place (ibid.). It is not on any occasion that someone is absent for any other from any place:

I will not say that Aga-Khan or the Sultan of Morocco is absent from this apartment, but I say that Pierre, who ordinarily stays here, is absent from it for a quarter of an hour. (ibid.)

To reflexively realize that someone is absent supposes that the relations of this person to the one to whom they are absent are preserved, except the one of facticity. Absence is not death (BN, 301). The intelligibility of absence requires its counting as a “concrete mode of the presence” of someone to someone else. As such, a distinction can be established between the empirical concept of presence and the fundamental presence of human realities to each other. The distance between two persons does not alter the fundamental fact of their reciprocal presence (ibid.). Our eventual position of relative ignorance regarding our concrete existence as objects is not to be confused with an alleged absence of thoughts and feelings with respect to each other.

If one considers the presence of someone to another person from the perspective of one of them, either that person is present to someone else as another subject (*sujet-autrui*), or someone else is present to that person as an object (*objet-autrui*). If they are present to someone else as another subject, then the whole world separates them from the other person (BN, 302), as in “Pierre

feels himself as existing for Therese". This does not alter the fundamental fact that she is "the one through whom 'there is' a World as a Totality" (ibid.). For a person to *feel* themselves as existing for someone else requires their existing in the world with an immediate union to it, without which the world would be inconceivable as a whole. As it is a fact that if one thinks, then one exists, so one can think of oneself as existing for someone else who is then thought of as a subject.

Conversely, if the other person is present to the first as an object, the distance which separates them is a contingent fact: e.g., "Therese exists in the middle of the world" (ibid.). That this person thinks immediately that someone else exists mediately in the world requires the *possibility* of the existence of a person with an immediate presence to the world. As it is possible for one to encounter someone else in the world, one can think of someone else as an object. This fact is contingent without being fundamental: that I can think of someone does not require certainty of one's existence, but only its possibility.<sup>28</sup>

The empirical concepts of absence and presence can therefore be taken as a specification of the fundamental concept of presence, independent of the concept of distance (BN, 302). This presence operates in transcendence. As I can think of someone else whose presence is *not* given to me, a path is conceivable which separates me from someone if I take it as an obstacle to surmount in order to reach that person or which connects me to someone if I take it as a means to reach them (BN, 302). These "paths" do not represent anything more than "instrumental complexes" enabling the determinate appearance of someone else as an object, as a "this" against the background of all that there is. To this extent, one's awareness of one's situation requires the conceivability of an infinite diversity of paths that one can take to meet with others (BN, 303).

The world remains one of a consciousness insofar as it is to a given consciousness that obstacles are unveiled. Nevertheless, "it is with regard [to] every living human that any human-reality is present or absent on the background of original presence" (translation modified, 303). The world to which a

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<sup>28</sup> Sartre will later emphasize the distinction between the inconceivability of counting as the author of a notice or report of one's own inexistence, and the conceivability of counting as the author of a notice or report of the inexistence of someone else (BN, 531-552).

consciousness makes itself present “implicitly and really” contains others, thought of as objects to which one could make oneself present (BN, 303). To grant the conceivability of mistaking someone for an object is not an obstacle which prevents one from conceiving the fundamental presence of humans (BN, 302). To think of the apparition of a human as an object in the field of my experience as that which provides my knowledge of the existence of others amounts to confusing the contingency of an encounter with someone else with the certainty of one’s existence. On the contrary, independent certainty of the existence of others is required by the conceivability of such experiences (BN 284; 292; 304). Insofar as my “being-for-others” (*être-pour-autrui*) is a constant fact of my human reality, that which I could be mistaken about is whether on a given occasion a “this” is someone or not. I cannot possibly make a mistake with respect to someone else and their real connection to me (BN, 304).

Thus, the structures of the for-itself and being-for-others cannot be derived from each other as a consequence of a principle (BN, 306). The for-itself does not result from the being-for-others: insofar as it designates one’s immediate presence to oneself, it is inconceivable that it is related to someone else and conceivable for it to be without being for someone else. Nor does being-for-others result from the for-itself: it is inconceivable without a relation to someone else and also inconceivable without the for-itself. The independence of these structures indicates the central difficulty raised by solipsism. Sartre’s project in *Being and Nothingness* is not anthropological (ibid.). A for-itself which exists without suspecting the possibility of being an object is conceivable, but it would not be “human”: it would be united with the world in a distinct way. But, presently, the *cogito* reveals the factual necessity that absence is inconceivable for an existence which is conscious *and* human:

It is found – and this is [indubitable] – that our being along with its being-for-itself is also for-others; the being which is revealed to the reflective consciousness is for-itself-for-others. The Cartesian *cogito* only [affirms] the absolute truth of a *fact* – that of my existence. In the same way the *cogito* a little expanded as we are using it here, reveals to us as a fact the existence of [an other mind] and my existence for [an other mind]. That is all we can say. (Translation modified, BN, 306)

To this extent, what Sartre calls a “*cogito* a little expanded” is conceived as a conceptual means to dispel a confusion between doubt concerning the factual existence of someone else and theoretical doubt with respect to the

existence of other minds (ibid.). As, in reflexion, the fiction of my non-existence indicates the indubitability of my existence, so the fiction of the non-existence of others indicates the indubitability of other minds' existence. In both cases, a doubt can be dispelled: that is to say, the necessity of a fact can be realized through determinate interrogation. There is no such thing as a reason to think that everyone else could be unavoidably absent from a theoretical perspective.

### 2.2.3. The Gratuitousness of Solipsism

We have so far considered the first three necessary and sufficient conditions of the theory of the existence of others proposed by Sartre (in brief: not requiring proof of the existence of others; contingent necessity; and the misleadingness of the reduction of persons to objects). The fourth condition is the difficulty raised by accounting for an internal and intuitive negation between "myself" and "the other". Sartre affirms that his earlier remarks concerning the internal negation of the for-itself are applicable to the relation of the for-itself with someone else (BN, 308):

If there is an other mind in general (*Autrui*), it is required that I can be that one who is not the other (*l'autre*) and it is in this very negation operated by me on me that I make myself being and that an other mind (*autrui*) arises as an other mind. This negation, which constitutes my being and which, as Hegel puts it, makes me appear as the *Same* facing the Other (*l'Autre*), constitutes myself on the ground of non-thetical ipseity as "*Myself*". (Translation mine)<sup>29</sup>

The negation that ought to be thought is one that has been unreflexively interiorized as constitutive of self-consciousness. Here, again, Sartre emphasizes that a "me" is not an "inhabitant" of a consciousness. He now confronts the pre-reflexive yet thetic assimilation of other consciousnesses to things from an allegedly exclusive perspective. To do so, he attempts to bring out how ipseity *can* reinforce itself by negating the ipseity of someone else. For inasmuch as ipseity already results from the pre-reflexive assimilation of one's consciousness to that of a thing, it is prejudged that any other would reflexively relate to oneself in the same way (BN, 308). This time, Sartre internalizes that such a negation may be

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<sup>29</sup> In the translation I propose of this passage, the capitalization of the words in French is preserved in order to bring out the distinction Sartre marks between other minds and the concept of other minds in the idealist approach that he confronts (see BN, 306).

reciprocal: another consciousness also has to make itself as the for-itself that I am for that one (BN, 308). On this approach, the consciousness of someone else would exist only at the exclusion of mine: “someone else exists for consciousness as oneself refused” (translation modified, *ibid.*). The negation that constitutes one’s ipseity thus cannot be direct. There is nothing it could bear on; someone else is originally neither me nor an object (*non-moi-non-objet*). What one’s negation bears on is the “me” refused by the other (*ibid.*). To this extent, one’s thinking of oneself as an object (*moi-objet*) is my “being-outside” (*être-dehors*) (BN, 309). The outlook of a being who is *already* assumed and acknowledged to be one’s outlook.

In reflexion, the question of *how* one assumes one’s being-outside is internally related to one’s taking account of the difference between objects and persons. Sartre stresses that it is *possible* to negate someone else from oneself only as a subject (BN, 308). As a reminder, in Sartre’s approach the negation from which the “theoretical problem” of the existence of the other stems is that “the other is the ‘me’ that is not me”. This constitutive negation cannot bear on anything, for it is inconceivable to negate the existence of someone else. To suppose that it is conceivable amounts to immediately refusing someone else as a “pure object”: that is to say, as an object but not as a person, thereby putting oneself in a defenceless position with respect “the Other”. I would then remain defenceless against my assimilation to someone else. Consequently, I can only hold someone else at a distance by accepting a limit to my subjectivity.

This limit is “my me-object” (*ibid.*). Consciousness for-itself cannot conceivably *produce*, in the first person, its differentiation from another consciousness for-itself. While it seemed as if consciousness could be limited only by itself in *The Transcendence of the Ego* (Sartre J.-P. , 2004, p. 4), now, inasmuch as consciousness for-itself is a perpetually incomplete detotalized totality: it cannot be limited by itself, otherwise it would be a finite whole. The me-object then appears as the absolute limit accepted by a subjectivity, the limit between two consciousnesses, produced by a limiting consciousness and assumed by a limited consciousness. In the absence of any conceivable mediation between two beings which are identical with respect to the way in which they act and are immediately present to each other, this limit constitutes the separation produced by a consciousness and assumed by another. One’s being-for-others is thus initially torn between two negations of opposed origin and inverse sense:

someone else *is not* the “me” that one intuits and I do not intuit the “me” that I am (BN, 310). This explains why the other initially appears as that which limits me; by refusing to make do with me, he puts me off-the-game and strips me of my transcendence. This outcome opens to me the possibility of assuming my limit. But then, by non-thetically taking consciousness of myself as one of my free possibilities, I assume I should be responsible for the fact of the existence of someone else:

It is I who by the very affirmation of my free spontaneity cause there to be an Other and not simply an infinite reference of consciousness to itself. (BN, 311)

Such attitude involves ambivalence. On the one hand, someone is obviously responsible for the way in which one acts and lives before someone else. On the other, Sartre indicates that some attitudes with respect to others presuppose an implicit pretence towards them. To pre-reflexively assume that one could be responsible for the fact of the existence of an other is tantamount to assuming that one could have a right to it. To ward off the spell of the Hegelian struggle for recognition by a mere act of will does not suffice and could even reiterate the difficulty it stems from.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, Sartre suggests at this stage that abstract acknowledgement of the existence of others cannot suffice in order to address the collective difficulty raised by solipsism. To do so, he first attempts to establish the absurdity of instrumental approaches to others. In this sense, he stresses that comparing humans with machines requires the undue exploitation of the fact that machines, as tools, present “the trace of a transcended-transcendence” or past human activity. Approaches which grant the intelligibility of the assimilation of humans to instruments renounce the obvious intelligibility of some attitudes by confusing the aim of an activity with its result:

The Behaviourist point of view must be reversed, and this reversal, moreover, will leave [an other mind] objectivity intact. For that which first of all is objective – what we shall call *signification* after the fashion of French and English Psychologists, *intention* according to the Phenomenologists, *transcendence* with Heidegger, or *form* with the Gestalt School – this is the fact that [an other mind] can be defined only by a total organization of the world and he is the key to this organization. If therefore I return from the world to [an other mind] in order to define one, this is not because the world would make me understand [an other mind], but because the Other-as-object is nothing

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<sup>30</sup> This difficulty will be treated in part 4.1.

but a center of autonomous and intra-mundane reference in *my* world.  
(Translation modified, BN, 318)

Sartre thus questions whether the philosophies of the time can meet the challenge raised by the behaviourist “point of view”. The difficulty is that if the world is taken to be seen-under-reduction, then everything is as if others would need to be defined “in general”. One’s seeing someone else is taken at this stage to be reducible to one’s seeing someone else as an object which could belong to one’s world at the exclusion of someone else (as the “center of autonomous and intra-mundane reference of *my* world”). It would be misleading to take Sartre as praising totalitarianism. *Being and Nothingness* was written during the Second World War in occupied France. Sartre calls into question his contemporary situation and the philosophies of his time to address the collective issue raised by well-known ideologies of the 1940s. In this context, his positive contribution is the sharing of reflexive and public means for self-defence. In particular, we shall see in part 4.1. that Sartre connects the prejudice that other people could lack to the obverse of one’s unreflexive endorsement of indifference. What is now required is to assess why it is behaviourism that he presents in opposition to philosophy from the fiction of the world seen-under-reduction. I will thus analyse the “method” of behaviourism (in one word: conditioning) to explain this point:

The rule, or measuring rod, which the behaviorist puts in front of him always is: Can I describe this bit of behavior I see in terms of "stimulus and response"? (Watson, 1998, pp. 6-7)

It is crucial to note that Watson presents a reflexive question as one which would need to be put *in front of him* in order to be posed. The direction of inquiry is inverted from the start. The mode of effectiveness of the behaviourist rule is left outside the scope of the question. And what Watson asks one to do is to question one’s ability to apply a mode of description. The question is rhetorical, for what Watson introduces is the way of applying a method of description. In his terminology, “stimulus” not only means “object in the general environment”, but also “changes in the tissues themselves due to the physiological condition of the animal”. Nevertheless, what he then presents as examples of stimuli are deprivations inflicted upon animals. As a counterpart, activities that involve intentional actions (e.g., building a skyscraper) are presented as “responses” distinct from non-intentional actions (e.g., jumping at a sudden sound) only in terms of their degree of organization. A behaviour is meant to be “prescribed” to

a human by “society” (Watson, 1998, p. 7). “Society”, he argues without further explanation, could somehow account for the authorship of prescriptions that the behaviourist could unquestionably represent:

The behaviorist is working under the mandates of society and consequently it does come within his province to say to society: “If you decide that the human organism should behave in this way, you should arrange situations of such and such kinds.” (Watson, 1998, p. 7)

Watson defends the idea that instrumental reasoning applied to humans is sufficient to organize collective existence. An “experimental [...] ethics” based on such an approach could tell us what to do. Within Watson’s (1998, p. 9) approach, this practice could legitimately legislate on marriage, divorce and family issues, apparently without any public discussion. Watson (1998, p. 11) explains his interest in controlling other’s activities by use of an analogy with physics:

The interest of the behaviorist in man’s doings is more than the interest of the spectator – he wants to control man’s reactions as physical scientists want to control and manipulate other natural phenomena. It is the business of behavioristic psychology to be able to predict and to control human activity.

Surreptitiously misusing both Luke’s gospel (5.37) and the gesture involved in *Metaphysical Meditations*, Watson (1998, p. 10) challenges his reader:

Behaviorism is new wine and it will not go into old bottles; therefore I am going to try to make new bottles out of you. I am going to ask you to put away all of your old presuppositions and to allay your natural antagonism and accept the behavioristic platform at least for this series of lectures. Before they end I hope you will find that you have progressed so far with behaviorism that the questions you now raise will answer themselves in a perfectly satisfactory natural science way. [...] [I]f I were to ask you to tell me what you mean by the terms you have been in the habit of using, I could soon make you tongue tied with contradictions. I believe I could even convince you that you do not know what you mean by them. You have been using them uncritically as a part of your social and literary tradition, let us forget them until later lectures.

Watson suggests that one’s questions could “answer themselves”. As such, although questions could be raised, posing them would *suffice* to obtain their answers. On Watson’s approach, this would not raise a difficulty. For “speculative” questions would be avoided and replaced with “scientific” ones by relying on the concept of conditioned emotional response, introduced as follows:

Convince yourself of this by making a simple test. If you will take a snake, mouse or dog and show it to a baby who has never seen these objects or been frightened in other ways, he begins to manipulate it, poking at this, that or the other part. Do this for ten days until you are

logically certain that the child will always go towards the dog and never run away from it (positive reaction) and that it does not call out a fear response at any time. In contrast to this, pick up a steel bar and strike upon it loudly behind the infant's head. Immediately the fear response is called forth. Now try this: At the instant you show him the animal and just as he begins to reach for it, strike the steel bar behind his head. Repeat the experiment three or four times. A new and important change is apparent. The animal now calls out the same response as the steel bar, namely a fear response. We call this, in behavioristic psychology, the conditioned emotional response, a form of conditioned reflex. (Watson, 1998, p. 8)

On the basis of this conception, we could regard any consequent of a conditional as a “response” to a scientific question, the antecedent truth of which would depend *solely* on one’s actions: if someone associates A to B while inflicting a treatment on someone else, then A will be associated to B by the one to who has been inflicted such treatment by someone else. Importantly, Watson is aware that the evaluation of such a conditional is not the object of the experiment, for how could one be surprised by the result of the treatment he describes? Watson’s approach to interrogation comes close the medieval sense of “question”. As he *states* it, he simply wants to convince us that this attitude should be endorsed, that we should relate to ourselves in the way described in the “test”. A notable blind spot of this approach to “questioning” is that it obliterates the possibility of a negative answer independent from the questioner’s actions. On Watson’s (Watson, 1998, p. 14) conception, the only thing that could indicate the failure of an attempted association of a stimulus with an object would be its inefficiency.

Both Sartre’s consideration of the need for inverting the behaviourist point of view and the importance in his account of the independence of correct negative answers are now obvious. The intelligibility of active denial, of one’s doing the contrary to what one says by saying the contrary to what one does, is here at stake: does Watson’s (1998) “experiment”, presented as relevant to “the real field of psychology”, not amount to the active and concrete mistreatment of a child and an animal, as well as a misconception of psychology? Although presented as an “experimental attempt” to obtain an answer to why a child is afraid when he or she sees something rather than something else, the “test” seems as much intended to convince the reader that a “conditioned answer” could count as an answer. Conversely, is the mistreatment of the child, animal and psychology in such an “experiment” not the obverse of the pretence to be able to interrogate them in such a manner? In an interrogation where an answer is

claimed to be obtained via conditioning, the results of the “test” seem to be gained by gratuitous exclusion of other ways of answering the initial question.

The reason that behaviourism was immediately taken as a threat to philosophy, reflected in Watson’s (1998, p. 17) prediction of its “gradually disappearing and becoming the history of science”, is plain. The reasons that Sartre thought both the philosophies of his time and some approaches to traditional philosophy were unable to meet the challenges of his time are yet to be clarified.

Sartre’s strategy is to confront the “metaphysical question” (i.e., “why are there others?”) involved in some philosophical approaches and which grant the intelligibility of an exclusive perspective on the whole (BN, 321). This criticism concerns Watson’s behaviourism insofar as his claim to unquestionably “work under the mandates of society” presupposes that he could inherit his authority *from* such an exclusive perspective on the whole.

Watson’s criticism, according to which traditional psychological concepts (such as introspection) are used uncritically, might have provided Sartre with a clue to the assumption of the conceivability of an exclusive perspective on the whole of all there is presupposed by the philosophies he confronted. Watson (1998, p. 5) considers “consciousness” as simply a conceptual substitute for “spirit”. As with “spirit”, the concept of consciousness would lack an observable counterpart. Sartre acknowledges that a concept of consciousness which presents no observable counterpart would, at best, remain unsatisfactory. However, he rejects the intelligibility of the requirement that the concept of consciousness would need to stand for a thing. Moreover, he does not grant that accounting for the whole of consciousnesses considered extensionally – the whole of those who are conscious somewhere – requires a unique “spirit” as its foundation (BN, 325). If the whole of consciousnesses is abstractly required, it is to account for the internal relations between consciousnesses. As considered earlier, conceiving oneself as an isolated self-consciousness (i.e., to think of one’s solitude) is inconceivable without acknowledging one’s past and concrete relations to others. Nevertheless, arguing against Hegel, whose failure he wants to diagnose, Sartre emphasizes the difficulty which arises when it is granted that a spirit would either require to be said “to exist” or “not to exist” for consciousnesses to count as such. This would mean that the synthesis of the multiplicity of consciousnesses could be achieved by a single consciousness, independent of anyone and of the

desegregation of which all consciousnesses would result (BN, 323). Following such an approach would mean that someone could take a point of view on the result of the synthesis of the whole.

Sartre rejects the of the synthesis of the whole of other consciousnesses can and need to be achieved. It suffices to acknowledge as its foundation a unique whole in which there are extensionally located, internally related consciousnesses. It suffices to acknowledge that this whole cannot conceivably result from one's synthesis. Sartre emphasizes that even an overarching consciousness could not achieve a point of view on such synthesis. Were such overarching consciousness related internally to other consciousnesses, it would have to be part of that whole and thereby without a point of view *on* it. Conversely, if one person took "spirit" to stand for one's own self-grounded being beyond any of one's consciousnesses (i.e., affective, judicative, etc.), one would then assume to view the whole of the extensionally located consciousnesses in the manner one can take a standpoint toward an object. Inasmuch as this would fail to acknowledge one's internal disaggregation, obverse to one's effort to recover oneself as *subject*, one would feel oneself without knowing oneself (ibid.). To grant the conceivability of taking an exclusive perspective on the whole is to this extent misleading. As such, it is not meaningful to ask whether one could obtain a point of view on that whole, for it cannot be relevantly said to be either attainable or unattainable (BN, 325).

The apparent problem raised by "metaphysical interrogation" which could bear on the existence of others can thus be solved. Acknowledging the facticity of any consciousness, of the unrestricted generality of its contingency, suffices to obtain its *de facto* or necessarily *a posteriori* answer: "this is so". This answer in turn is equivalent to saying that there is no answer (BN, 325). Sartre's approach is not unlike Kant's (1998, pp. 504-505; A478-B506) in siding with common sense concerning the limits of knowledge, granting that the absence of an answer can be taken as the solution to the question if one is ready to reconsider one's expectations. As it is *a priori* inconceivable to take a point of view on the whole of extensionally located consciousnesses, it is necessary *a posteriori* that such a question cannot conceivably admit a positive answer. The negative answer it can obtain *de facto* proves to be a superfluous answer to a question raised from nowhere, or nonsense: "there is no conceivable point of view on the whole: the

whole has no ‘outside’ and the very question of the meaning of its ‘flipside’ is meaningless” (BN, 325).

Conversely, the blind spot of methodological solipsism is that it presupposes the conceivability of doing without other persons in order to understand others. Sartre’s project retrospectively appears as an account of the unity of the diversity of structures presupposed by consciousness. In his approach, the intelligibility of such unity presupposes that it could not be thought and exteriorized independently of concrete relationships with others. It is, to this extent, aimed at showing how methodological solipsism, as a doctrine, consists in the denial of the existence of other persons.

#### 2.2.4. A Sort of *de facto* Solipsism

We have now considered the theory of the existence of others proposed by Sartre. Has the issue raised by solipsism been resolved? If it has been established that the “theoretical” problem of the existence of others is a pseudo-problem, can we not still consider solipsism as raising concrete difficulties that need to be confronted? In the second part of the first chapter, I stressed the importance of distinguishing between standpoints and perspectives to account for the abstract relation of consciousness and the body. After these analyses, Sartre seeks to explain concrete relationships with others. The upshot of his approach is that unreflexively assuming, in the first person, that one’s point of view could be an exclusive perspective involves assuming that one’s concrete relations with others are ordered by one’s expectation of appearing to others in determinate ways:

I am the trial of the other: this is the original fact. But this trial of the other is in-itself an attitude with respect to the other, that is to say, I may be *in presence of others* without being this “in-presence” under the form of having to be it. (BN, 385)

Sartre thus describes concrete relations with others from the perspective of conflict, inasmuch as it is the “original meaning of being-for-others” (BN, 386). It would be misleading to interpret Sartre as praising conflict. Rather, he attempts to provide a reflexive description of motives (not reasons) to endorse conflicting attitudes. The first attitude he considers is one where “I claim to be this being that I am”, where one considers “recovering” one’s “being” by freeing oneself from the influence of someone else (*ibid.*). Sartre suggests that an unreflexive attempt

to assimilate the freedom of the other is the obverse of an unreflexive attempt to free oneself from the other's freedom. The categorical approach to others is, on this occasion, definitively rejected:

It is not the pure category of the other which I project appropriating to myself. This category is not conceived nor even conceivable. (BN, 387)

However, as an unreflexive attempt to act by oneself without internalizing the meaning of one's concrete relations to others, attitudes corresponding to the project of a "self-recovery" (i.e., the "quests" for enchanted love, enchanting language and disenchanting acknowledgement of one's failure through masochism) are the obverse of one's unreflexive attempt to act upon the freedom of others. What is common to these attitudes is that they involve the ordering of one's actions to the look of others. Sartre then considers a second type of attitude, whose endorsement involves rejecting the sense of the look of others.

This attitude is indifference towards others, or "a sort of [*de facto*] solipsism" (translation modified, BN, 402). This characterization immediately raises the question of the relation between indifference and solipsism. What motivates Sartre's use of the idiom of solipsism in order to characterize indifference? At this stage in *Being and Nothingness*, the pseudo-problem raised by solipsism has been resolved. So why introduce this idiom anew? One explanation is that it could yet be tempting to identify indifference as a concrete counterpart of solipsism that would eventually come to require a treatment along the lines of behaviourism. In other words, it could be tempting to turn solipsism as a doctrine into a method adequate for envisaging the psychology of others, as well as for relating with them in order to confront the concrete difficulties raised by indifference. However, at first sight, Sartre's characterization of indifference as a "sort of *de facto* solipsism" suggests that he does not equate them. In this approach, if discussing indifference matters in a discussion of solipsism, it is first of all in order to distinguish them.

My suggestion is that Sartre deals with this difficulty as an educator. As we shall see, he does not ascribe intentions to anyone and considers the possibility for indifference to be appropriated by an individual as a schema for one's actions as a "primitive reaction" (i.e., the first one available to an individual). It might be that an individual does not even realize that they can act differently. This does not escape the fact that Sartre treats indifference as a bad

faith attitude, but he does not use “bad faith” as a term of criticism targeted against an individual. Indeed, as we shall see, Sartre’s portrait of the sort of *de facto* solipsist suggests the following: that he seems lost, that he seems worried that he seems not to be feeling well, and that he and others feel unease and embarrassment. If anything is to be done, on Sartre’s approach, it ought to be constructive. First, if indifference is the expression of one’s primitive reaction in respect to others, then surely someone is accountable for this or that action that one commits, even if one could not relevantly be taken to be accountable for having had this primitive reaction to others. Second, the motives of someone acting this way are, without communication, as opaque as the background of this individual. Understanding the motives of someone acting indifferently toward others does not amount to granting that they can and should be equated with reasons for acting in such ways. However, if what is wished is to be helpful in some way, it is surely helpful to understand the motives of this person. This in turn considering their situation, which seems to be precluded by Watson’s behaviourism.

On my reading, Sartre’s treatment of indifference as a sort of *de facto* solipsism is accordingly aimed at avoiding a double difficulty. On the one hand, Sartre earlier stresses that “no one is truly solipsistic” (BN, 274). If that is the case, then the difficulties posed by solipsism are irreducible to the correct identification or ascription of intention to someone. However, on the other hand, some actions concretely manifest an attitude of indifference with respect to others and can be described as such. How, then, should we describe indifference in a way which does not require granting that an individual could be truly solipsistic, but which nevertheless does not imply granting the relevance of indifference in any sense?

Sartre characterizes it as the felt counterpart of an attitude that he also calls “blindness with respect to others”. He specifies that “blindness” should not be taken literally. With respect to others, it does *not* literally involve a privation of ability: one is responsible for its endorsement. One may not “suffer” indifference, as if one were unable to act “differently” (e.g., like Melchior Inchofer in *The Monarchy*). One is thus responsible for one’s indifference towards others. This does not imply that such an attitude could be reflexively chosen by someone as a concrete way of relating to others. But one can unreflexively come to endorse it.

It can be one's "originary reaction to [one's] being-for-others" (BN, 402). Sartre characterizes its "leading pattern" (*schéma directeur*) as follows:

I direct my look upon [someone] who is looking at me. But a look cannot be looked at. As a soon as I look in the direction of the look it disappears, and I no longer see anything but eyes [...] This means that in my upsurge into the world, I can choose myself as looking at [someone's] look and can build my subjectivity upon the collapse of the subjectivity of the other. (Translation modified, BN, 401-402)

Sartre also elucidates the alleged obverse of the unreflexive endorsement of this pattern:

I practice then a sort of factual solipsism; others are these forms which pass by the street, those magic objects which are capable of acting at a distance and upon which I can act by means of specific conducts. I scarcely notice them; I act as if I were alone in the world. I brush against "people" as I brush against a wall; I avoid them as I avoid obstacles [...] of course they have some knowledge of me, but this knowledge does not touch me. [...] Those "people" are functions. (BN, 403)

Sartre stresses the disagreeability of endorsing indifference to everyone. That is to say, although he grants that this "state of blindness" may last for extended periods, even a lifetime, he suggests that it is no one's character. The feeling of lack, uneasiness or endless dissatisfaction is described as the exact counterpart of one's acting indifferently with respect to others. In such an approach, one's acting as if one is the only person in other people's presence exactly amounts to acting as if they could be reduced to the means of fulfilling one's wishes in order to satisfy the functions to which one's actions would imply that they are reduced to. Against the background of one's endorsement of indifference, any attitude would be explicitly twofold. On the one hand, one would protect oneself from others in the following way: "it is about protecting myself against the danger that makes me run my being-outside-in-the-freedom-of-the-other" (translation mine, 403). On the other hand, one would use others "in order finally to totalize the detotalized totality which I am, so as to close the open circle, and finally to be my own foundation" (BN, 403). Sartre locates the source of this ambivalence in the implicit levelling of persons and objects. For, if while acting unreflexively, one takes for granted that seeing someone does not differ from seeing something, one does not distinguish seeing someone from seeing what is designed in order to satisfy a function, a tool. One's feeling of being seen doing so then involves implicit acknowledgement of eventually being seen as being designed to satisfy a function in return (a tool). On this approach, as an

endorsed human attitude, indifference is independent of any profession and can be characterized as the unreflexively acquired ability to act by using others as tools in order to satisfy one's own desires:

In making direct proof of [an other mind] as a look, I defend myself by putting [an other mind] to the test, and the possibility remains for me to transform [an other mind] into an object. But if [an other mind] is an object for me while *he is looking at me*, then I am in danger without knowing it. Thus my *blindness* in anxiety is because it is accompanied by the consciousness of a "wandering and inapprehensible" look, and I am in danger of its alienating me behind my back. (Translation modified, BN, 404)

Sartre suggests that the endorsement of indifference as an efficient attitude has, for a felt counterpart, an anxiety, the significance of which one implicitly acknowledges. To obtain others' obedience through the practice of indifference suffices to satisfy one's desires; however, adopting such an approach involves putting oneself in danger. The "wandering and inapprehensible" look is the concrete manifestation of one's implicit understanding of this danger. Inasmuch as I unreflexively attempt to appropriate the freedom of others for myself by treating them as objects, I both irritate myself, for I cannot obtain what I want from others, and I nihilate my implicit understanding of what I want. Sartre diagnoses such an attitude as both aimless and meaningless:

I engage in desperate research of the freedom of the other, and along the way, I find myself engaged in research which lost its sense; all my efforts to bring back sense to this research result only in making me lose it further and provoking my bewilderment. (Translation modified, BN, 404)

Against the background of the endorsement of indifference, wherein any attitude allows a twofold meaning (protecting oneself from being used by others, and using others to protect oneself), one is led to treat the meaning of one's conduct as only probable or imagined, "leaving [one] with a vague and irritating impression of a total knowledge but with no object" (ibid.).

The absurdity of taking the existence of other minds to be proven can thus be retrospectively reconsidered. Requiring such proof amounts to rejecting the meaning of one's attitudes with respect to others. Sartre, four years after the publication of *Being and Nothingness*, further emphasised this point by inviting his audience to interrogate, in the first person, the implicit commitment of the eventual demand for proof of faithfulness to someone else:

If only my belief in this woman was precisely absent of jealousy, that is to say, if only this woman had given me absolute proofs that I can trust her: always this proof of the absolute which will enable me to be what I am. [...] There is another consciousness which is as lacking and whose synthesis with the first would realize, one would believe, the in-itself-for-itself. There is, for example, in the belief that this woman is faithful to me, a consciousness lacking to thought, which is the intuitive recognition of the faithfulness of the woman, which is that which I require by a proof, and that I may never have, for it is nothing but a belief. (Translation mine, Sartre, 2003, p. 163)

By treating one's trust in someone else as the mere absence of mistrust (here: jealousy), one might fail to acknowledge the significance of one's demand for a proof of faithfulness to someone else. For what is the meaning of demanding an "absolute" proof of someone else's faithfulness? Sartre suggests that it amounts to maintaining the appearance that such a demand is based upon doubt. That is to say, the motive of the conduct is precisely to deny the intuitive recognition of the trust which enables one's demand of such "proof". By treating one's trust in someone else as the content of a belief that could be established independently of one's actions, one presents one's implicit understanding of one's situation with respect to someone as a "mere" belief whose dubiousness could perhaps never be overcome (in Sartre's example, the intuitive recognition of the faithfulness of a woman).

#### 2.2.5. The Gesture of Solipsism

To conclude this chapter, on the basis of Sartre's conclusions, I will reconsider the manifest impersonality of the gesture of solipsism in its written expression. We saw that, when he characterizes solipsism as "a positive attempt not to use the concept of the other", Sartre uses the Husserlian term of "ἐποχή" to characterize Watson's approach to psychology. Sartre thus notes a similarity between the gestures of Watson and Husserl:

We could now let the universal ἐποχή, in our sharply determinate and novel sense of the term, take the place of the Cartesian attempt to doubt universally. But with good reason we *limit* the universality of that. [...] Our purpose is to discover a new scientific domain, one that is to be gained *by the method of parenthesizing*, which, therefore, must be a definitely restricted one.

The restriction can be designated in a word.

*We put out of action the general positing which belongs to the essence of the natural attitude; [...]*

I am exercising the "phenomenological" ἐποχή which also completely *shuts me off from any judgement about spatiotemporal factual being*. (Husserl, 1983, pp. 60-61)

The behaviorist asks: Why don't we make what we can *observe* the real field of psychology? Let us limit ourselves to things that can be observed, and formulate laws concerning only those things. Now what we can observe? Well, we can observe *behavior* – *what the organism does or says*. (Watson, 1998, p. 6)

Both Husserl and Watson appeal to a restrictive limit. For Husserl, the limit is “determined” and can be characterized by putting it out of action: it is the thesis which belongs to the essence of the natural attitude. For Watson, the limit is “to determine” in order to render observable the real field of psychology. We have seen that Sartre explicitly aims to show, in favour, among others, of Husserl and Heidegger, that the behaviourist point of view must be inverted in order to leave the objectivity of another mind intact (BN, 318). Insofar as the so-called method of phenomenological reduction involves renouncing any judgment on spatio-temporal existents, it seems to exclude that the objectivity of another mind *could* and would need to be established. The section on “the look” retrospectively appears as an attempt to expose, in response to the phenomenological philosophies of his time, the difficulty raised by taking solipsism for a method. Sartre (2004, p. 28) had already attempted to surmount this difficulty by providing “the sole possible refutation of solipsism”. This was described as follows:

So long as the *I* remains a structure of consciousness, it will always remain possible to contrast the consciousness with its *I* on the one hand and all other existents on the other [...] But if the *I* becomes a transcendent, it participates in all the world's vicissitudes. It is not an absolute, it did not create the universe, it falls as all other existences under the epochē; and solipsism becomes unthinkable as soon as the *I* no longer has any privileged position. (Sartre J.-P. , 2004, p. 29)

Solipsism could be confused with someone's wish to attain a position which it would be impossible for others to access. It then seems that by negating the possibility that there could be only one person that can access such a position, it would be possible for anyone to access the position of an “absolute” and “impersonal” consciousness (ibid.). To accomplish the “liberation of the transcendental field” (Sartre J.-P. , 2004, p. 25) thereby seems to allow for solving the theoretical problem by discovering its reason rather than its motive. Sartre then claims that “if the *I* of the ‘I think’ is the primary structure of consciousness”, the angst which would enable describing the so-called psychasthenic malady would be “impossible” (Sartre J.-P. , 2004, p. 28). The function of the Ego is left relatively undetermined: “perhaps, indeed, the essential function of the Ego is not

so much theoretical as practical” (Sartre J.-P. , 2004, p. 27). This “practical function” is taken to provide the means to *mask* spontaneity from consciousness. It thus seems that “consciousness could suddenly produce itself on the pure reflexive plane” and that this anguish is motivated by a “fear of oneself” which would be “absolute and irremediable” (Sartre J.-P. , 2004, p. 28). However, if such “fear,” which would be key in describing psychasthenic troubles, could also be constitutive of consciousness, the motives of such troubles would also count as a “permanent motive” for phenomenological reduction, thereby subtracting it from its apparent gratuity (Sartre J.-P. , 2003, p. 130).

Sartre explicitly rejects this approach to solipsism in *Being and Nothingness*. The difficulty is that the previously conceived “remedy” reproduces what it is meant to remedy. Not only does it suggest that a motive for action can be identified with a reason for it, for, concretely, it leads to ascribing either erroneous (BN, 306) or unavowable intentions (BN, 249); it also obscures the theoretical problem. If there were a subjectless transcendental field reducible to the consciousness of an Ego by itself, then nothing would exclude the affirmation of the existence of the other requiring a similar field, whereupon the problem of the undue reclamation of a privilege for one’s position would be posed anew, and so on (BN, 249).

Nevertheless, at this stage, a central concern with respect to the approach to solipsism proposed so far can be raised. We have considered the possibility of a sort of *de facto* solipsism which presupposes an implicit pretence to an exclusive right with respect to others, allegedly from an exclusive perspective on the whole. Thus, if the theoretical problem raised by solipsism has been shown to be a pseudo-problem, it seems now that it could raise a deeper issue. Could the meaning of such pretence be relative to each individual? And if this is not the case, to what extent can the claim to draw the limits of thought be equated with the linguistic expression of solipsism? Could it not be the only way to exclude the possibility of the pretence of an individual concerning all others?

At this stage of the present dissertation, these concerns may neither be answered nor dismissed in a satisfactory way. We have seen, in the first chapter, that ratifying *a posteriori* our eventual and respective confinement to representations implies admitting that one could adopt an exclusive perspective on the whole. In this chapter, we have seen that the “theoretical problem” of being eventually confined to representations is a pseudo-problem, insofar as it

can be established *a posteriori* that the existence of others is indubitable. All in all, it has been shown that one's *a posteriori* ratification of our confinement to representations is meaningless. The central difficulty that remains is thus whether the very solipsistic decree that could imply or preclude our being eventually confined to mere representations could be achieved. The treatment of this difficulty by Sartre and Wittgenstein remains to be addressed. I will first turn in the following chapter to Wittgenstein, inasmuch as the criticism of an *a priori* evaluation of the truth of our propositions is a core aspect of his approach to the issue raised by solipsism.

### 3. The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* on the Issue of Solipsism

The aim of this chapter is to establish that Wittgenstein proposes a way to settle the issue of solipsism. At the end of chapter 2, it appears that in order to confront the issue of solipsism, it is not enough to address the retrospective issue of ratifying *a posteriori* the possibility of our confinement to representations. It is also required to call into question the conceivability of an *a priori* exclusive perspective from which sense could be legislated upon by some decree that would imply or preclude our eventual confinement to representations. By legislating on sense, I mean trying to impose strictures on the expressions of our thoughts, as when Schopenhauer (2010, p. 3) claims that “the world is my representation” is the first maximally general *a priori* valid truth with respect to any living and knowing being which should be acknowledged. This raises the question whether presenting Schopenhauer’s claim this way does not amount both to exclude the relevance of his approach and the possibility of solipsism. For if the way in which the issue raised by solipsism presupposes that the correctness of solipsism is excluded, then, this could call into question whether such way could count as a way to settle the question of solipsism at all and reiterate the difficulty.

I thus start by emphasizing that the way in which Wittgenstein proposes to settle the issue of solipsism implies to grant that solipsism has a core of truth, manifest in “the world is my world” (TLP, 5.62). In the introduction, I suggested that Wittgenstein rejects the idea of the truth of propositions could be evaluated *a priori*, saying that wishing to delimit them *a priori* lead us to nonsense (TLP, 5.5571), while avoiding what Floyd (1998, p. 81) calls “the self-undermining project of trying to frame *a priori* arguments against the possibility of *a priori* knowledge” by granting that solipsism contains a core of truth in its opposition to conceptions of the *a priori*. I characterized this opposition as fluctuating, following Floyd’s (1998, p. 81) suggestion that “solipsism is one the most persistent refuges of the *a priori*”. As previously mentioned, traditional conceptions of the *a priori* assume that solipsism *must* to be excluded. As suggested, Kant criticizes Leibniz’s conception of a pre-established harmony between those who represent the world

to themselves and their representations. Sullivan (2013, p. 258) characterizes Kant's construal of an alternative conception of harmony as follows:

He held that the harmony between representations and reality that is needed for them to amount to a mode of knowledge could be secured only by recognizing a role for our representations in constituting the reality to which they answer.

As Sullivan suggests, on Kant's approach, a harmony which assures that thinking genuinely engages with the world would be required. In its absence, our thought could fail to genuinely engage with the world. Wittgenstein, however, questions the need for such harmony:

6.371. At the basis of the whole modern view of the world lies the illusion that the *so-called* laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena. (Italics mine)

Wittgenstein does not grant that "laws of nature" provides us with an explanation of natural phenomena. As earlier suggested, the difficulty with the idiom is that it makes it look as if natural regularities could and would need to be transgressed. This differs from Kant's approach, who suggest in the *First Critique*, that we ought not to present ourselves to nature as pupils. Rather, in the natural sciences, we would instructed by nature as if by an appointed judge who *compels* witnesses to answer the questions he puts to them (Kant, 1998, p. 109; BXIII). The analogy between the relation of the human mind and nature and the relation of a judge to witnesses he compels is required according to Kant to draw a contrast between the approach he proposes with the one which is at play in conceptions of metaphysics where "reason [...] is supposed to be its own pupil" (1998, p. BXV) which would require to be put back on the sure path of science.

Lewis, as a critic of the traditional conception of the *a priori*, but also as the author of a renewed, "pragmatic" conception of the *a priori*, confronted the difficulty implied by the idea that alternatives could and would need to be excluded *a priori*. His distinction between two senses of necessary, as opposed to "contingent" and as opposed to "voluntary" (Lewis, 1929, p. 197) enabled him to question the conception of necessity as an *a priori* sort of involuntary compliance. That this target also falls under Wittgenstein's criticism is plain: "A necessity for one thing to happen because another has happened does not exist. There is only *logical* necessity" (TLP, 6.37). On his side, Lewis (1929, p. 113) rejects both Leibniz's conception of pre-established harmony and Kant's conception of "preestablished amenability":

The problem of the “deduction of the categories” can be met without any metaphysical assumption of a preestablished amenability to categorial order in which is independent of the mind. (Lewis, 1929, p. 38)

As Conant emphasizes, Lewis assumes, after Kant, that cognition must involve an element of passivity which is necessary in the sense of being non-arbitrary (Conant, 2012, p. 49). This element of passivity is what Lewis calls “the given” which would be required as follows:

If there be no datum given to the mind, then knowledge must be contentless and arbitrary; there would be nothing which it must be true to. And if no interpretation or construction which the mind itself imposes, then thought is rendered superfluous, the possibility of error becomes inexplicable, and the distinction of true and false is in danger of becoming meaningless. (Lewis, 1929, p. 39)

Lewis rejects the requirement for pre-established amenability; however, he does not question the Kantian assumption that is questioned by Wittgenstein and that Sullivan calls a “harmony through which thinking genuinely engages with the world”. In his own terms, Lewis’ conception of the *a priori* requires acknowledging the imposition of a constraint on the basis of a legislative model: “the *a priori* legislation of mind can not apply to experience unless what is given in experience is already limited or determined in some consonant fashion” (Lewis, 1929, p. 198). Granting the need for such *a priori* legislation, is a crucial incentive for Lewis’s account for what he calls the pragmatic element in knowledge. On the other hand, from this perspective, solipsism is criticized as follows:

To repudiate [...] transcendence is to confine reality to the given, to land in solipsism, and in a solipsism which annihilates both past and future, and removes the distinction between real and unreal, by removing all distinction of veridical and illusory. (Lewis, 1929, p. 183)

By comparison, Wittgenstein’s rejection of the *a priori* occurs in the book before he introduces his approach to necessity (TLP, 6.37). He makes a concession to solipsism, which is that there is no *a priori* order of things (TLP, 5.634), before this move. Granting this before engaging with the question of necessity suffices to question not only the conception of necessity as involuntary compliance, but also the need to reply to the alleged defects of such a view on the basis of an *a priori* conception of voluntary compliance. I here follow Sullivan’s (2013, p. 265) suggestion that:

Wittgenstein’s response to Kant is to deny that any restrictive or contrastive limitation is needed. Only so can the self of solipsism shrink to an extensionless point, leaving the whole of reality coordinate with it. So, if Wittgenstein’s ethics were to require such a contrast, it would not be loosely interwoven with his logical thought: it would be in direct collision with it.

In this approach, it is not required to exclude solipsism, inasmuch as this would imply acknowledging that one could and should construe the limits of language as limitations. However, if it can be shown that the limits of language cannot and need to be construed as limitations, it will thereby have been shown that the very attempts to impose strictures on the expressions of our thoughts are manifest as such. In this approach, it falls to solipsism or to the object-centered view, to establish in which sense its attempts do not amount to impose strictures on the expression of our thoughts. As Wittgenstein puts it:

4.312 [...] My fundamental idea is that the 'logical constants' are not representatives; that there can be no representatives of the *logic* of facts.

We saw in section 1.1.2, that, on Wittgenstein's approach, the issue raised by solipsism involves imagining that one could (from an ideal standpoint) single oneself out from every other human being on the basis of being *specifically* different from them (NB, 15.10.16). The central difficulty with such an approach is that it confuses solitude (i.e., a human possibility) and unicity (i.e., the property of an object of which there is one and only one exemplary under a description). If thinking of being alone amounts to thinking of oneself as a unique object that could be owned from a private and exclusive perspective, then it could seem that one could inform oneself of one's uniqueness (i.e. the property of each and every individual) in a way that would be exclusive. One could inform oneself of one's exceptional property of being unique in a way that risks calling into question the possibility of agreement. Such an approach immediately raises the difficulty of a tension between the public character of language (inasmuch as language does not depend exclusively on any one person) and individuation (inasmuch as individuation requires the appropriation of language). The difficulty is the following: could one inform oneself by means of language that one is unique from an exclusive perspective? The alleged possibility that should be questioned is thus whether one could express this to oneself without first acknowledging or denying the existence of one's world.

Wittgenstein's strategy to dissolve this tension in the *Tractatus* is dispelling the confusion according to which one could fail to belong to *any* world (that is, one among others). That is to say, Wittgenstein proposes a means for solving the tension between individuation and the public character of language. In this approach the section on solipsism is designed to come to terms with the view

that what solipsism means could depend on an exclusive perspective. Wittgenstein proposes considering solipsism as posing a difficulty that needs to be settled: “this remark provides [the] (*den*) key to the question, to what extent solipsism is a truth” (translation modified, TLP, 5.62). The remark he refers to here is that “the limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (TLP, 5.6). I will suggest this invites us to reconsider whether there could be an ineluctable disagreement between the ways in which one represents the world to oneself, and the ways in which one expresses oneself by means of language.

I will thus argue in section 3.1. that presupposing arbitrary and restrictive limits on thought in order to exclude an exclusive appropriation of the concepts of world and language stems from a confusion. For, as someone could not take an exclusive perspective on the world, it is superfluous and misleading to wish to exclude that it is impossible to do so. Then, in section 3.2., I argue that the issue raised by solipsism can be settled to the extent that it contains a core of truth – “the world is my world” – that it is adequate for appropriation.

### 3.1. The Criticism of Legislating on Sense

At the end of the previous chapter, I considered the difficulties raised by alleged attempts to refute solipsism. Similar concerns are addressed in the context of the *Tractatus*. For instance, Hacker (1986, p. 134) presents the *Tractatus* as an expression of “transcendental solipsism”. He accounts for Wittgenstein’s rejection of a “thinking, representing subject” (TLP, 5.631) by arguing that it is the counterpart of a conception of “the self” which implies acknowledging the “non-encounterability of the self” as an essential feature of experience (Hacker, 1986, p. 82) and which also implies a “reference to a metaphysical self” (Hacker, 1986, p. 90). As a counterpart of this conception, Wittgenstein is said to have conferred a “supreme” and “indubitable” importance to “the mystical” (Hacker, 1986, p. 96). In this approach “the ineffable manifests itself, and cannot be said” (Hacker, 2000, p. 382).

Herein, I suggest that Hacker (1986, p. 82) highlights the core of the issue raised by solipsism when he suggests that Wittgenstein invites us to acknowledge the “non-encounterability of the self”. However, on the view I will defend in chapter 4, this amounts to dispensing with a reference to “a metaphysical self”. In

the present chapter, I will try establish that Wittgenstein questions the conceivability of refuting solipsism. This is because Wittgenstein's approach does not imply resignation with respect to the limits of language. On this question, I agree with Diamond's suggestion that resignation is not due.

Diamond (1995, p. 181) rejects that "an ineffable truth" was conceivably "gestured at" by the *Tractatus*. On her approach, Wittgenstein proposes rejecting "the language of 'feature of reality'". Such language would only be transitorily useful and would need to be "let go of and honestly taken to be real non-sense, plain nonsense, which we are not in the end to think of as corresponding to an ineffable truth" (Diamond, 1995, pp. 181-182). She proposes that the *Tractatus* presents a "private language argument" (Diamond, 2005, pp. 262; 282-284) best understood by comparison with early Russell's conception of "acquaintance with one's own self" (Diamond, 2005, pp. 264-265) that seems required once the distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description is granted. She questions the meaningfulness of resignation with respect to the limits of language (Diamond, 2011, pp. 240; 261-263). She underlines the risk of reifying "the self" when we attempt to account philosophically for the translatability of a "'my' centred-experiential language" (presupposed by solipsism) and "our ordinary ways of representing the world" (Diamond, 2011, p. 272).

I agree with Diamond's view that the Tractarian concern with "[t]he language which only I understand" prefigures the concern with "private language" in the *Investigations*, and that comparison with the early view of Russell sheds light on early Wittgenstein's approach to solipsism. I also agree with her view that the risk of reifying the self, which goes together with referential conceptions of the self, is to be taken into account, and I will try to do so both in this chapter and the following. On the reading I propose in this chapter, the concept of appropriation is treated as useful for both avoiding the difficulty implied by the reification of the self and accounting for the Tractarian approach to solipsism. As we shall see in the fourth chapter, Sartre uses the concept of appropriation. Its usefulness resides in enabling dissolution of the tension between individuation and the public character of language, inasmuch as it does not presuppose that the relation between individuals and language can be one of ownership (and could thereby imply exclusivity). Furthermore, this concept leaves intact the core of truth of solipsism which is contained in "the world is my world".

On this question, I side with Friedlander's (2014, p. 57) idea that "solipsism becomes an issue for Wittgenstein as a misfired attempt at essentially involving a unique self, myself, in the very nature of experience". However, the truth of solipsism consists in the idea that "the world is my world", as asserted in 5.641. This truth provides, on the one hand, "an antidote to certain fantasized ways of holding to my sense of uniqueness" without, on the other hand, "giving up on individuation, on a way to speak of the self in philosophy" (Friedlander, 2014, p. 62). The task that the truth of solipsism provides is that of "realizing the self as the capacity to agree with the world expressed as 'the world is my world'" (Friedlander, 2014, p. 62). Friedlander (2001, p. 118) previously suggested that "appropriation is the central determination of existence". He further said that "the pronoun 'my' is crucial [...] in marking the fact that the range of possibilities always depends on the concrete use 'I' make of language" (Friedlander, 2001, p. 120). He has also recently suggested that the truth of solipsism "points to the relation between uniqueness or essential individuation of a subject and the recognition of what is uniquely real" (Friedlander, 2014, p. 62).

The reading I propose of the *Tractatus* (notably of propositions 5.633 and 5.6331) in chapter 1, by relying on aspects of Sullivan's approach, differs from the views of Hacker, Diamond and Friedlander with respect to the following: I emphasize that the gesture implied by the alleged schema of the visual field displays the wish to impose an arbitrary limitation from an exclusive perspective on all there is, which can be called into question inasmuch as it presents a collective dimension that we see Sartre to be explicitly addressing in the second chapter and that will be addressed anew in the fourth one. The collective dimension it presents is that, endorsed as method, solipsism favours the instrumentalization of individuals and nourishes endorsement of indifference as a concrete way of relating to others.

In the present chapter, I continue to side with Sullivan's (2013, p. 257) approach to the limits of sense, according to which "the notion of a 'limit' [...] is a non-contrastive, non-excluding one: limits have no 'other side'; there is nothing 'beyond them'". I assume, following this view, that the confrontation with solipsism in section 5.6 is construed in order to reject the idea of a harmony between thought and world (Sullivan, 1996, p. 203).

Finally, the reading I propose of the Tractarian approach to solipsism is indebted to Floyd (1998, p. 104), particularly her suggestion that "solipsism is a

metaphysical version of loneliness – or perhaps better, a metaphysical attempt to overcome the possibility of loneliness”.

As mentioned previously, the aim of this section is to call into question whether an exclusive perspective from which legislating on sense, or imposing arbitrary strictures on the expressions of our thoughts can be achieved and should be achieved. Is it necessary at all to presuppose that there could be such a perspective? To admit that there is one amounts to presupposing that one could be arbitrarily entitled to contrast what one can and cannot designate in the world (TLP, 5.6). However, if such a perspective is not required, the linguistic gesture, according to which some possibilities could be excluded *a priori*, can be rejected. This question is thus tied to solipsism, which, as we saw at the end of chapter 2, manifests itself through the pretence of drawing limits to the thinkable. This gesture is challenged in the introduction to the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein affirms that the meaning of his book can be summed up with “what can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent” (TLP, Preface). He immediately specifies that this is not equivalent to drawing a limit on thinking (*dem Denken*), and rather that the book will draw a limit to the expression of thought (TLP, Preface). Wittgenstein explicitly states that he is indifferent (*gleichgültig*) to whether his thoughts have already been thought before him by someone else. His approach in the preface to the question of the limits of thought is developed in sections 4.112-4.12, before its reiteration in 5.61 at the beginning of the section on solipsism.

This section starts with the assertion that “[t]he limits of my language mean (*bedeuten*) the limits of my world” (TLP, 5.6). This remark falls between one on endorsing an *a priori* approach and another remark bearing on extensional approaches to logic presupposing the relevance of an arbitrary exclusion. Wittgenstein suggests in the earlier remark that giving (or specifying) elementary propositions *a priori* must lead to obvious non-sense (*offenbarem Unsinn*) (TLP, 5.5571). In section 5.61, Wittgenstein suggests that any attempt to arbitrarily contrast what one can designate (or refer to) with what one could not designate in the world raises a difficulty. This difficulty is that such an attempt to discount possibilities would require an outer perspective on the world. We can therefore understand proposition 5.6 as addressing a tension between “the limits of my world” and “the limits of my language”. Wittgenstein neither equates nor dissociates such limits at this stage. Rather, through the use that he makes of the

first-person possessive determiner “my” he seems to suggest that, as a first step, appropriating one’s language with its limits means appropriating one’s world with its limits. But why envision, and furthermore question, the possibility of a mismatch between the two in the first place? An element of answer to this question can be found in the *Notebooks*:

The difficulty of my theory of logical portrayal was that of finding a connexion between the signs on paper and a situation outside in the world.

I always said that truth is a relation between the proposition and the situation, but could never pick out such a relation.

The representation of the world by means of completely generalized propositions might be called the impersonal representation of the world.

How does the impersonal representation of the world take place?

The proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it. (NB, 27.10.1914)

Wittgenstein leaves aside the idea that a connexion between written signs and a situation in the world should be “found” in order to account for truth. Discounting the relevance for the search for such a connexion does not involve renouncing the possibility of an impersonal representation of the world. Rather, it suggests that conceiving the proposition as a model of reality as we imagine it suffices to account for the possibility of impersonal representation of the world by means of completely generalized propositions. If the proposition is a model of reality, then anyone can use propositions to describe the world without coordinating any name with any definite object (TLP, 5.526-5.5262). However, according to how one approaches the notion of an impersonal representation of the world (which is not the same thing as a “theoretical” one), incompatible ways of reading 5.6 can be construed.

If an impersonal representation of the world is taken to imply restrictions upon one’s language and one’s world, then 5.6 expresses a nightmare. From the “object-centered view” analysed at the end of chapter 1 (which we found also criticized in Sartre’s approach), 5.6 leads to considering the worst possible scenario. For if “my” is taken as a way of marking that one’s world and one’s language could be owned as an object can be owned, then it seems that agreements between individuals would be inconceivable. “World” and “language” would count as objects whose ownership would be disputed among claimants. In order to settle such disputes, sense could and should be subjected to strictures. Insofar as the ownership of objects can be exclusive (i.e., someone can exclusively own an object), conceiving “world” and “language” on the model of objects

implies that they could be exclusively owned. However, inasmuch as they cannot, holding on to such an approach would imply subjecting sense to strictures in response to the alleged possibility that they could.

However, if the independence of an impersonal representation of the world for reasons which are both collective and individual is acknowledged (for *specific* reasons), then 5.6 can be taken as a transitional step drawing the attention of the reader to the use of the first-person possessive determiner. It would emphasize that someone's expressions involve the appropriation of one's language and one's world in a non-contrastive way. There would be no such thing as being disowned from one's language and one's world in the absence of claiming ownership of them in the manner that one could claim ownership of an object. This is not to say that potential disagreements and struggles would need and could be excluded *a priori*. It simply suggests that an approach to sense where imposing strictures is unnecessary and confusing contributes to providing public means to avoid taking the worst conceivable scenarios as bases for expressions and actions. On this approach, sense cannot be legislated upon and one's measured appropriation of language rather involves expressive and meaningful activities.

As mentioned, I will argue in section 3.1. that presupposing arbitrary and restrictive limits on thought in order to exclude an exclusive appropriation of the concepts of world and language stems from a confusion. As part of this, I will first argue in section 3.1.1. that accounting for the uses of the concepts of the intertwined wholes of world and language does not imply admitting that they could be restrictively limitative. Then I will argue in section 3.1.2. that the Tractarian requirement of determinacy of sense is not the instrument of a legislation bearing on sense. This requirement does not and cannot exclude vagueness, but it does constitute a means to establish that the pretence to impose arbitrary strictures on thought is superfluous and misleading.

### 3.1.1. World and Language

In order to examine the relevance of claiming an exclusive perspective from which sense could be legislated upon, and inasmuch as I suggest that 5.6 calls into question the conceivability of an ineluctable disagreement between language and world, I will now consider whether Wittgenstein's approach to the

issue of solipsism in the *Tractatus* requires concluding that limitations would be integral to our conceptions of the intertwined wholes of world and language. The reason for this is that if using either “world” or “language” involves attributing limitations to them, then one’s relation to others by means of language could also be internally restrictive. However, if using “world” or “language” does not imply such limitations, then interpreting one’s relations to others by means of language as restricted in any sense would stem from confusion. Notably, if the notion of world can be construed in a way that enables distinguishing between a relevant and a conceivable absence in a way that does not depend on one and only one individual, then a main pivot of solipsism will be undermined, for it suffices to establish the non-situated character of the presupposition of the generalized absence of others. I suggest this is achieved through the introduction of the notion of negative facts, which will be studied henceforth.

The first proposition of the *Tractatus* equates the world with all that is the case (TLP, 1). Significantly, Wittgenstein does *not* write that the world is “merely”, “nothing but”, “only” or “solely” all that is the case. The sentence does not involve any sort of restriction which could apply to the world. It does not imply that the world could be reducible to any (somehow contingent) set of facts. To count as “the world”, not just any set of facts could suffice; the world is equated with the unique maximal set of facts (or, as we shall see, the unique totality of holding atomic states of affairs). If 1 is meant to show anything, it could simply be that to count anything as the world necessarily requires a unique set of facts that is not exhaustive “merely” contingently. Granting this does not imply that any knowledge is thereby acquired about the world.<sup>31</sup>

What is at stake in 1 is the distinction between, on the one hand, a set or collection and, on the other, a whole or totality. To use Sullivan’s (1996, p. 205) example, any of the members of a set or collection can be subtracted from it without the set or collection thereby ceasing to be one. One’s stamp collection, for instance, would remain a stamp collection even if one were to lose a stamp. One could make an inventory or list of the contents of that collection. One could take away any item from the collection. One could exclude any of the listed items

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<sup>31</sup> On Wittgenstein’s criticism of acquaintance, see *Elucidating the Tractatus* (McGinn, 2006, pp. 259-261). I will return to this question in its relation to the notion of proposition in part 3.2.1.

from the collection and bar it from the list. Yet this would not prevent the list from counting as an inventory of the collection. One could discover or remember the content of that collection during an inventory. In any case, the content of that collection would be independent of the activity of listing it.

However, the same cannot be said of a whole or totality. If a stamp collection is taken as a whole, then each state of the collection (if stamps are added or removed) would correspond to different wholes. A whole or totality does not result, as a collection or a list does, from an aggregation of elements standing in external relations to each other. On the contrary, it presupposes that the relations between the units of a whole are internal: if one can be differentiated, then so can every other one. Accordingly, to list the contents of such a whole would be uninformative.<sup>32</sup> If the relations among units are solely external, then listing could be required. But inasmuch as these relations are internal, such listing is not required. Subtracting the differentiated units from a whole or totality, then, would be tantamount to treating a whole as a set or assimilating one whole with another.

By rejecting the notion that the world could be the totality of things in 1.1 (“the world is the totality of facts, not of things”), Wittgenstein implicitly suggests that certain difficulties regarding some conceptions of the world stem from the surreptitious treatment of facts as things. He does not specify which ones, but proposes considering whether all the facts together determine the world (TLP, 1.11). His argument is that the totality of facts determines not only what is the case, but also what is not the case (TLP, 1.12). This raises a question: how can all that is the case determine all that is not the case? The difficulty is that it might seem that all that is not the case is obtained by subtracting all that is the case from all that could be the case.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, accounting for the world as the

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<sup>32</sup> Wittgenstein (1991, p. 195) puts this point as follows in *Gesamtheit und System*: “Space is the possibility of the ‘where’, time the possibility of the ‘when’, number the possibility of the ‘how many’”: one place is one among others, one moment is one among others, a number is one among others” (translation mine). This is a crucial criticism addressed by Wittgenstein to Russell: “what is false in Russell’s conception is that he builds the points in space on the basis of factual events. Such ‘space’ does not go further than our knowledge of factual events” (ibid.).

<sup>33</sup> For a detailed account of these early sections of the *Tractatus*, see “Negation et totalité dans le *Tractatus* de Wittgenstein” (Narboux, 2009, p. 128).

totality of facts seems to require, as for early Russell, making an inventory of its content from a perspective according to which it could be exhausted.<sup>34</sup>

Wittgenstein introduces the notion of logical space with “the facts in logical space are the world” (TLP, 1.13). This does not imply that facts depend on each other. Although the world divides into facts (TLP, 1.2), one fact can be the case or not while everything else remains the same (TLP, 1.21). The collective whole of facts, the world, is thus not meant to be *some thing* in which *every thing* can be found (which would involve that something could necessarily exist). On the contrary, from the start, Wittgenstein suggests that the misleading appearance of the requirement of an existence (of the world as a “necessary” collection of facts) results from surreptitiously treating facts *as* things, which is left aside in 1.1.

Wittgenstein then defines what counts as a fact: what is the case, the fact, is the holding of a state of affairs (*das Bestehen von Sachverhalten*) (TLP, 2). Next, he defines what counts as a state of affairs: a state of affairs is a combination of objects (entities, things) (TLP, 2.01). A difference with Russell’s approach can be noted: Wittgenstein does not distinguish between facts involving several related entities and those involving one and only one simple entity. On the contrary, Wittgenstein criticizes the accidental character of the connection between a thing and a fact presupposed by any such conception. Granting the accidental character of this connection would lead to renouncing the internal relation between a thing and a state of affairs (TLP, 2.0121). Insofar as a thing could hold all by itself independently from any others, the question would remain of whether or not it could fit into a situation. Everything would be as if connecting isolated things to the situations in which they could be encountered was necessary.

However, by affirming that it is essential for a thing that it can count as an element of a state of affairs (TLP, 2.011), Wittgenstein suggests that the difficulty is actually the opposite. Insofar as something can be situated with respect to other things within situations, it can be said to stand independently from others: “it is essential to a thing that it may be an element of states of affairs”. The possibility of the occurrence of a thing within a state of affairs must be *prejudged* in a thing (TLP, 2.012). That anything could occur into a state of affairs does not require either a judgement or a prejudice. It is the independence of things that is

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<sup>34</sup> See *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* in *Logic and Knowledge* (Russell, 2010, pp. 29-30; 62).

at stake and cannot be called into question (TLP, 2.0122). Wittgenstein suggests that the intelligibility of something standing by itself requires that it could be a constituent of states of affairs in which it would be standing in relation to others:

2.013 – Every thing (*Ding*) is, as it were, in a space of possible [states of affairs] (*Sachverhalte*). I can think of this space as empty (*leer*), but not of the thing without the space. (Translation modified).

That the internal relation between a thing and space cannot be conceivably reversed is underlined: the absence of a thing from a space can be thought, but the presence of *something* could not be thought without the availability of a space it could occupy.

Wittgenstein then returns to “objects”, earlier characterized as entities or things which can be connected in a state of affairs (TLP, 2.01). As an “entity” or “thing”, an “object” (*Gegenständ*) cannot be conceived independently from its possibility of being combined with other objects (TLP, 2.0121c-d). Rather, the intelligibility of one’s knowledge of an object requires that one knows the states of affairs in which it could be found (TLP, 2.0123) as well its internal properties (TLP, 2.01231). Thus, what applies to things also applies to one’s knowledge of objects: the absence of an object from a place in space, an empty space may be thought, but the presence of an object could not be thought without the availability of a space it could occupy. Wittgenstein exemplifies this affirmation in four ways (TLP, 2.0131): the spatial object must lie in infinite space; the visual speck must have a colour; the tone must have a pitch; the object of touch must have hardness. Insofar as they can be thought, spatial objects need to be lying *somewhere*; seen specks to be of *some* colour; heard tones to be of *some* pitch; touched objects to be of *some* hardness. A spatial object, a seen speck, a heard tone or a touched object count as such insofar as they are one among other conceivable ones. Notably, all these examples presuppose the availability of the modality under which they can be thought.

Sections 2.04-2.06 return to the concept of “world” with the distinction between facts and states of affairs and the notion of the space of possible states of affairs. The totality (*Die Gesamtheit*) of *actually* holding (*der bestehenden*)<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The possibility that a state of affairs holds (when a determinate state affair is considered) is its holding (*Das Bestehen*). This may be distinguished from its holding when considered as one among others that are holding (when determinate states of affairs are considered collectively), which is their actual holding as a whole (*Der bestehenden*).

states of affairs is the world (TLP, 2.04). Facts are already acknowledged as determining the world as a whole by determining both what is the case and what is not the case (TLP, 1.11-1.12). Similarly, the totality of holding states of affairs is also acknowledged to determine those which do not hold (TLP, 2.05). Nevertheless, Wittgenstein does *not* suggest that there is a totality of non-holding states of affairs:

2.06 - [The holding] (*Das Bestehen*) and [the non-holding] (*Nicht Bestehenden*) of states of affair is reality.  
 ([The holding] of [states of affairs] (*Sachverhalten*) we also call a positive fact, and [the non-holding] of states of affairs a negative fact).  
 (Translation modified)

Wittgenstein distinguishes a state of affairs that holds from one that does not by calling the former a positive fact and the latter a negative fact. This should not lead to underestimating a difference that can be noted between “facts” and “states of affairs” at this early stage of the *Tractatus*. While a fact can be negative or positive, the same does not apply to states of affairs. This distinction matters in order to disarm an obvious difficulty which can arise in any discussion of negative facts. In 1918, Russell (2010, p. 42) reported this difficulty:

One has a certain repugnance to negative facts. The same sort of feeling that makes you wish not to have a fact “*p* or *q*” going about the world. You have a feeling that there are only positive facts, and that negative propositions have somehow or other got to be expressions of positive facts. When I was lecturing on this subject at Harvard I argued that there were negative facts, and it nearly produced a riot: the class would not hear of there being negative facts at all. I am still inclined to think that there are.

This difficulty can be rephrased: were we to say that “there is” that which is not the case, then that which is not the case would need “to be” or “to exist” *in order to be said to not be the case*. Granting this would lead to an aporia: if a negative fact needed “to exist” or “to be” in any sense, then it would need to be or exist as a “non-being” or a “non-existent”. Yet, if a negative fact were to exist in such a way, then what is not the case would need to be indeterminate, insofar as its differentiation from other “non-existents” or “non-beings” would remain at best mysterious.

By distinguishing between facts and states of affairs, Wittgenstein provides means to dissolve this aporia. First, as with positive facts, equating negative facts with things (the ones “named” by the words used to designate them) is misleading. A negative fact is not something, or an entity, that could and

would be missing for someone. Rather, something can be absent or lacking to someone and a negative fact can be noted. Second, as with positive facts, negative facts do not involve only one entity in isolation from all others. The absence of something from a space can be noted insofar as it could have occupied it, insofar as it *could have held* in a state of affairs which does not currently hold. Third, like facts, states of affairs do not mutually depend on each other (TLP, 2.061). Furthermore, the holding or not of a state of affairs cannot not be inferred (*geschlossen werden*) from whether another state of affairs holds (TLP, 2.062). In no sense would noting that a state of affairs holds or not enable us “to draw the conclusion” or “infer” whether or not another one holds. On the one hand, there is no such thing as a contradiction that could – as it were – “belong” to the world. On the other hand, noting the independence of the eventual holding of states of affairs is not informative (i.e., does not provide any information concerning the world).

I can now emphasize that both Wittgenstein and Sartre introduce negative facts in order to address the difficulty raised by solipsism. In each case this concept is introduced at the beginning of their work, for the notion of negative facts enables distinguishing between a relevant and a conceivable absence in a way that does not depend on one and only one individual. As emphasized, Wittgenstein’s concept of world as the totality of facts does not involve restrictions on our use of this concept: “the total reality is the world” (TLP, 2.063).

In order to address the issue raised by solipsism, I questioned the conceivability of an ineluctable disagreement between language and world that would imply a limitation to our uses of these notions. Inasmuch as no limitation is implied by Wittgenstein’s introduction of the notion of world, I will now turn to the section of the *Tractatus* in which language is considered, and I will question the idea that it involves acknowledging a limitation internal to one’s use of “language”. This is evident in the following proposition:

4.002 - Man possesses the capacity of constructing (*bauen*) languages, in which every sense can be expressed, without having any idea how and what each word means (*bedeutet*) — just as one speaks without knowing how the single sounds are produced.

Colloquial language (*Umgangssprache*) is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it.

Wittgenstein suggests that anyone can learn any language that others have helped to build, and that any language *enables* expressing every sense (*Sinn*). Nothing requires in advance that anything could not be expressed by anyone. Notably, this does not presuppose knowing either how words signify or the meaning of words. Wittgenstein does *not* suggest that languages are built by individuals who uniquely have the capacity to build languages. Rather, he stresses that, as a part of the human organism, colloquial or everyday language (*Umgangssprache*) is at least as complicated as this organism:

4.002 – From [colloquial language] it is humanly impossible to gather immediately the logic of language (*Sprachlogik*).

Language disguises the thought; so that from the external form of the clothes one cannot infer the form of the thought they clothe, because the external form of the clothes is constructed with quite another object than to let the form of the body be recognized.

The silent adjustments to understand colloquial language are enormously complicated.

Acknowledging the impossibility of gathering the logic of language immediately from everyday language cannot and need not to involve any restriction. Acknowledging this impossibility is helpful, as much to internalize the autonomy of its everyday uses, as to gather its logic. There is no reason to suppose that disguising thought in language was the aim of those who contributed to building it. Rather, this shrouding of thought by language is, in fact, a clue to the possibility of the agreement of our purposes when attempting to gather its logic with the purposes for which language was built. On this reading, the *Tractatus* could not have been written in order to replace, substitute or correct ordinary language with an “ideal”, “perfect” or “formal” language, that is, with a language of another “sort”.<sup>36</sup>

Wittgenstein thus suggests that the complexity of the tacit conventions underlying everyday language has been underestimated. He diagnoses that most propositions and questions bearing on philosophical things (*philosophische Dinge*) are not false, but nonsensical. This suggests that the importance traditionally ascribed to these questions should be reconsidered, as much to acknowledge the autonomy of everyday language as to acknowledge the autonomy of philosophy:

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<sup>36</sup> On this point, I agree with Friedlander (2001, pp. 103-107).

4.003 [...] we therefore cannot answer questions of this [style] at all (*dieser Art*), but only [establish] (*feststellen*) their senselessness (*Unsinnigkeit*). (Translation modified)<sup>37</sup>

Although it is undeniable that such alleged questions have been spelled out (and thus involve the past activity of someone), Wittgenstein nevertheless rejects that one should have to answer them. This line of analysis leads to the second slight modification that I propose: “to state” the senselessness (or nonsensicality) of a question does not suffice, since it suggests that their senselessness depends on one’s arbitrary decision. Wittgenstein suggests, rather, that their senselessness can be established. That is to say, that one can engage in a process which ends with the establishment of their senselessness.

Wittgenstein mentions a question of this style: “the question whether the Good is more or less identical than the Beautiful” (TLP, 4.003). This question shares an external similarity with everyday questions, as it is composed of a string of words in an embedded form (as sometimes in ordinary subordinate clauses, such as “she told me that the question of whether he will make it is a complicated one”). Such a question could be rewritten as “is the Good more or less identical than the Beautiful?” by adding a question mark at its end. Yet the concern such string of words raises is that there is no obvious way, without additional consideration, to foresee and thereby distinguish what would count from what would not count as an answer to it. It can and should be granted that the string is composed of familiar words which could each appear in other sentences. Yet when disposed in such a way without further explanation, the alleged sense of the whole they compose may at best seem intrinsically unsettled. The difficulty is that it is unclear how one could fulfil one’s expectation of an answer, for candidate answers will be as indeterminate as the alleged question. In other words, the alleged answers would be as confused as the alleged question, which means that one could not determine whether one’s expectation of an answer has been fulfilled: “and so it is not to be wondered at that the deepest problems are really *no* problems” (TLP, 4.003).

I have thus far questioned the conceivability of an ineluctable disagreement between language and world but did not encounter any such thing

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<sup>37</sup> The modification of the translation I propose here is an attempt to mark the difference between a *kind* (as this would presuppose that the questions considered by Wittgenstein could fall under a category) and the result of an activity.

as a reason to consider that limitation could be implied by “the limits of my language means the limit of my world” (TLP, 5.6)

In the *Notebooks*, 5.6 is immediately followed by the remark below, from the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1915, which provides the key to deciding on the issue of solipsism:

There really is only one world soul (*Weltseele*), which I for preference call *my* soul, and as which alone I [detect] (*erfasse*) [this] (*das*), what I call the soul of others. (Translation modified)

This passage does not appear in the *Tractatus*, where the following appears in its place:

5.61 - Logic fills the world; the limits of the world are also its limits.

We cannot therefore say in logic: this and this there is in the world, that there is not.

For that would apparently (*scheinbar*) presuppose that we exclude certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case, since otherwise logic must get outside of the limits of the world: that is, if it could consider (*Betrachte*) these limits from the other side also.

What (*was*) we cannot think, that (*das*) we cannot think; we cannot therefore say, what we cannot think.

How to account for the internal relationship between these passages, if there is any? A common element shared by the entry in the *Notebooks* and proposition 5.61 is the use of “this”, an indexical.<sup>38</sup> It plays a crucial role in the arbitrary contrasting of what we can with what we could not designate (or refer to) in the world. The arbitrariness of such a contrast appears when one considers such use of language in its internal relation to one’s world. Contrasting two objects we can refer to by means of two tokens of “this” with another object we can refer to by means of a token of “that” can be done. For example, if we are discussing which of three objects we plan to send to someone should be put in a given box in which the three objects do not fit. In such a case, we can distinguish what can be put in the box from what cannot by taking into account the different dimensions of the objects (i.e., their sizes). Given the end of sending these objects

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<sup>38</sup> The use of indexicals by Wittgenstein to suggest this point is crucial. In the entry in the *Notebooks* dated the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1915, Wittgenstein suggests that “what seems to be given us *a priori* is the concept: this – Identical with the concept of the object”. As underlined by Ishiguro, if the simplicity of objects is taken to derive from our treatment of them as such, so we can always use the expression “this” in order to refer to an object we can refer to by a name or a definite description: “for every entity that we can individuate can be referred to as ‘this’ or ‘that’, regardless of whether the object is present or absent, or given or not given to the senses” (1969, p. 36). She stresses that this view differs from an approach such as that of Russell, according to which the meaning of “this” changes on every occasion of its use (1969, p. 35). On the Tractarian approach, “this” is not a name, and cannot be substituted with names or definite descriptions (1969, p. 37).

to someone, we could even agree on finding another box that could hold all three objects. In such a case, we can consider the three objects and the box as a totality in the empirical sense, as a collection of items.

However, if we apply this line of reasoning in logic, then we treat the limits of the world as limitations. As Sullivan (2013, p. 258) puts it: “limitations are boundaries separating what qualifies for inclusion within them from what does not”. If in logic we assume there is a conceivable decision with respect to what qualifies or not for inclusion in the world, then we presuppose that we could discount possibilities from an outer perspective on the world. In the same move, the world is treated as a totality in the empirical sense. Importantly, not to assume such a scenario is the first element of dispensing with the necessity of guaranteeing logic.

Comparing Wittgenstein’s suggestion in 5.61 to Frege’s (1964, p. 14) approach at the beginning of the *Basic Laws of Arithmetic* might be helpful here:<sup>39</sup>

What if beings were even found whose laws of thought flatly contradicted ours and therefore frequently led to contrary results even in practice? The psychological logician could only acknowledge the fact and say simply: those laws hold for them, these laws hold for us. I should say: we have here a hitherto unknown type of madness.

Frege suggests that one should somehow exclude the possibility that “men or other beings” could be discovered and who would be capable of passing judgements contradicting our laws of logic. The difficulty Frege (1964, p. 15) spells out is not that such “beings” could “reject” the laws of logic, but that they could be “right in doing so”:

If other persons presume to acknowledge and doubt a law in the same breath, it seems to me an attempt to jump out of one’s own skin against which I can do no more than urgently warn them.

One can then be tempted “to make” that “what is true is something objective and independent of the judging subject” (Frege, 1964, p. 15) . One could also be tempted to consider truth as “unalterable” (thereby assuming truth could undergo a process of alteration that could be initiated if it did not belong to

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<sup>39</sup> Inasmuch as only the gesture pointed out by Wittgenstein in 5.61 is here studied, I will not propose an extensive account of Frege’s rejection of psychologism. With respect to the internal relation between this gesture and Frege’s conception of truth, see Sullivan’s summary account (Sullivan & Potter, 2013, pp. 175-176).

a domain independent from any of us). This would enable assuring oneself of truth irrespective of the constitution of the minds of other “humans or beings”:

For me there is a domain of what is objective, which is distinct from that of what is actual, whereas the psychological logicians without ado take what is not actual to be subjective. (Frege, 1966, p. 16)

Frege (1964, p. 17) grants that “every man has his own ideas, which are not those of any other”. Nevertheless, he makes an important concession to a certain approach to psychologism and thereby to solipsism. For Frege suggests that psychologism leads to solipsism through idealism (Frege, 1964, p. 17). Wittgenstein suggests the same but, unlike Frege, he does not suggest that we *could* be constrained to grasping ideas meant to be “within our selves” if there were not other ideas external to anyone. Furthermore, logic would and could somehow be appointed “arbiter” of conflicts of opinions in order to settle disagreements about what we could understand as “outside our own selves”. Frege does obviously not deny the availability of logic to anyone when presenting his approach as able to render possible a “logical arbitration” of conflicts of opinion. However, a tension arises if one admits that the possibility of logic presupposes the existence of a distinct “domain of what is objective”. It then seems that psychologism (and thereby solipsism) could *reject* the *existence* of such a domain and thereby could put into question the *possibility* of logic. This could furthermore render impossible a conflict of opinion. The difficulty is then that although one considers oneself to be providing a means of a “logical arbitration” of conflicts of opinion, there remains a misunderstanding that occurs with respect to what a conflict of opinions is. Projection comes to rule.

To rely on the gesture of arbitrarily contrasting of what we can with what we could not designate is to this extent superfluous and misleading, inasmuch as this would apparently amount to excluding a possibility. The occupation of a place in space manifests, on reflexion, that a possibility holds (cf. TLP, 2.013). It is not necessary, and it is misleading to exclude anything in this respect: if a place in space is occupied by something, could it be said at all that it “merely” or “possibly” occupies that place? In this case, the negation contained in “merely” or “possibly” would rather be meant to apply to a possibility that holds, what it cannot and need not to.

At stake is the relevance of the distinction between “objects” and “logical objects”, the latter’s existence being rejected by Wittgenstein in 4.441 and 5.4.

Furthermore, contrasting individuals on the basis of their “compliance” to the “laws of thought” is at stake. A detective’s activity requires him to exclude certain possibilities in order to establish the identity of a criminal. But the way in which a detective discounts the relevance of a possibility concerning a crime involves its intelligibility. However, in logic we are not investigating problems which could be solved by means of observation (TLP, 5.551), nor are we concerned with incriminating anyone or diagnosing “types’ of madness”. Furthermore, in logic it is not necessary to coordinate any name with a definite object (TLP, 5.526-5.5262), so it is not necessary to presuppose the existence of an additional domain in order to assure the connection of thought with the world. Our words are not reducible to labels of their meanings.<sup>40</sup> To presuppose that every word can be reduced to a label suggests that the significance of our uses of words could be discounted (as if our uses of words could be meaningless until things are labelled anew). Moreover, it also points to a difficulty stemming from the assumption that logic could depend on a single mode of labelling or a single categorical ordering. That multiple ways of labelling can be conceived can be taken into account.

However, if it is superfluous and misleading to claim an exclusive perspective from which sense could be imposed strictures on, is it necessary to admit that the determinacy of sense should be renounced? If this were the case, then the means provided in 5.62 by Wittgenstein to settle the issue raised by solipsism would be inadequate. If determinacy is the only opposite of vagueness, then the possibility of vagueness *should* be excluded in order to settle the issue of solipsism. But this would exclude that requiring the determinacy of sense could suffice to settle the issue of solipsism without implying a decision. In order to suggest that a decision is not implied in settling the issue raised by solipsism, I will consider whether it is necessary to set determinacy in *opposition* to vagueness.

### 3.1.2. Determinacy and Sense

In this section, I argue that the Tractarian requirement of determinacy of sense is not an instrument for imposing strictures on the expressions of our thoughts. I argue that, on the contrary, requiring determinacy of sense is designed

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<sup>40</sup> I here agree with Ishiguro’s (1969) seminal suggestion that conceptions according to which ostensive definitions would suffice to account for meaning were already targeted in the *Tractatus*.

to render explicit that we can mean precisely without such strictures. Not to know what one means or not to know what someone else means can happen. However could this always be the case? If it was granted that it could always be the case, then it would seem that one could never know what one means or what others mean. Consequently, one could be tempted to implement a “legislation” (i.e., a set of rules excluding some uses) which could bear on our use of propositions in order to assure that they are meaningful, and that some of them are true. However, are cases where one does not know what one means or what someone else means exceptional or, rather, ordinary? If they are ordinary, then, the intelligible occurrence of such cases implies (necessarily or non-contingently) that we can distinguish them from other cases where we know exactly what we mean by our words. It would then be superfluous and misleading to attempt to provide rules to assure that we mean what we mean with the words we use. Such views are, in the reading I propose, targeted by Wittgenstein’s account of the determinacy of sense. This, nevertheless, does not preclude that either clarifications of our language-use or means for clarifying our language-use can be shared. As an alternative, Wittgenstein clarifies that the determinacy of the senses of our propositions could not be at risk and that we can express our ourselves precisely. In the terms of the *Tractatus*, if it can be shown that a given string of signs having one and only one analysis displaying its existential presuppositions is the same as counting as a proposition, then it is not necessary to exclude that a string of signs which does not have such a unique analysis does not count as a proposition. This shows that one can, by means of a given proposition, mean exactly what one means, nothing less and nothing more. In relation to the issue raised by solipsism, the difficulty implied by granting that the determinacy of sense would need to be renounced is that the means provided by Wittgenstein to settle the issue raised by solipsism would be inadequate. The first question I will thus address is thus whether we need to grant that the Tractarian requirement of the determinacy of sense excludes vagueness.

That the requirement for determinacy would involve, as an unbeknownst counterpart, the exclusion of vagueness is suggested by Maddy (2014, p. 63) and Putnam (2012, p. 349). Nevertheless, Wittgenstein, unlike Frege (1979, p. 155), notably refrains from presenting vagueness as being excluded by the requirement of determinacy of sense in the *Tractatus*. He earlier wrote in the *Notebooks*, “[i]t seems clear that what we mean must always be ‘sharp’ (*sharfen*)” (NB, 20.6.15),

and that “I only want to justify the vagueness (*die Vagheit*) of ordinary sentences, for it *can* be justified” (NB, 22.6.15). The tension can be addressed as follows. If “determinate” (*bestimmt* in German) is sometimes used as an antonym of “vague” (*vage* in German), another antonym is “indecisive” (*unentschlossen*). Were it used as the contrary of “vague”, “determinate” would mean something similar to “sharp” (*scharf*), making it an adjective used to qualify what one speaks about.

Frege assumes that the user of these terms can be described as predicating properties of a boundary (e.g., “a *sharp* boundary”). But were it used as an antonym of “indecisive”, “determinate” would mean something similar to “resolute” (*entschlossen*) in order to describe someone whose words or actions express what they mean. Accordingly, used as an opposite of “vagueness” (*Vagheit*), determinacy (*Bestimmtheit*) is used to mean ascription of a property to what one speaks about (e.g., a question or report). However, when used as the opposite of “indecision”, determinacy could hardly be said to belong to someone as a property. In this use, “determinate” is used to qualify or characterize the attitude of someone. The question becomes, whether using “determinacy” as Wittgenstein does in relation to “sense” (*des Sinnes*) implies a requirement which could *bear* on sense:

3.23 - The requirement (*die Forderung*) that simple signs be possible is the requirement that sense be determinate (*Bestimmtheit des Sinnes*). (Pears & McGuinness)<sup>41</sup>

Wittgenstein suggests that the requirement of the possibility of simple signs is tantamount to requiring the determinacy of sense. He does not use “sense” as a term designating a thing whose determinacy is a property awaiting ascription. This would involve reifying “sense” or equating it with “substance”.

That Wittgenstein’s approach to propositions as pictures of reality is designed to put into relief our shared ability to use them to communicate thoughts to each other has previously been considered. According to 3.23, requiring the possibility of simple signs just is requiring that sense is determinate. Furthermore, 3.23 has a pivotal role in the *Tractatus*: key elements of Wittgenstein’s approach to images are set out and considerations regarding

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<sup>41</sup> Contrary to Ogden, Pears and McGuinness do not translate “*die Forderung*” as “postulate” in 3.23. But they translate “*fordern*” as “postulate”, like Ogden, in 6.1223. I suggest that “requirement” is adequate in both passages.

notations are introduced in the passages that follow immediately (TLP, 3.24). He suggests later in 6.1223 that the feeling that “logical truths” are required is tied to our possibility of requiring an adequate notation. What needs to be explained is how the determinacy of sense can be required without also requiring the “givenness” (as an essential property) of sense, whether *a priori* or not?

To answer this question, marking the distinction between a requirement and a process can help. Indecision does not result from a process initiated by someone for this purpose. But vague questions and vague answers can be spelled out or expressed, requiring someone’s agency or activity. However, doing so could not transform indecision into a process that one could both initiate and undergo. If one can be uncertain with respect to what could answer a vague question (before having realized its vagueness), conversely, one can be surprised by a determinate answer to a vague question (after having realized that one’s question had a determinate meaning although one did not realize it yet). On this approach, in the *Tractatus*, logic is indifferent to vagueness, which differs to contemporary attempts to either account for or exclude its possibility. Indifference with respect to vagueness does not presuppose that vagueness could have been excluded by indifference. It is not because vagueness constitutes a threat to language use that the determinacy of sense is required. Rather, it is because vagueness cannot conceivably constitute a threat to language use that the determinacy of sense is required. Wittgenstein affirms that “all propositions of our colloquial language are actually, just as they are, logically completely ordered” (TLP, 5.5563).

This affirmation does not imply that ordinary languages use is possible *only* against the background of a logical order that could and should be considered independently of its use from an exclusive perspective. To explain this point, a parallel can be made with Sartre’s approach, inspired by gestalt psychology, as considered previously. Every form implies a background of undifferentiated forms: it is immanent to perception to require a background which cannot conceivably come to the foreground. Similarly, Wittgenstein suggests that the logical ordering of the propositions of our colloquial language is immanent to them: acknowledging the impossibility of immediately gathering the logic of language is not tantamount to requiring that the possibility of indeterminacy in colloquial language should be excluded. Nevertheless, does this conversely involve appealing to a conception according to which logic could be

ascribed an action, such as “imposing demands on the world” (Putnam, 2012, p. 349)?

This question, I suggest, can be answered only if the personification involved by such a charge is called into question. If the Tractarian approach to logic involves acknowledging the intelligibility of propositions in our everyday language as implied by formalized operations that can be done by us, then there is no such thing as a tension between our colloquial propositions and logic. I suggest that evaluating “sense” solely by means of the yardstick of the verb “give” creates this tension. While someone can decide to give something to someone, to require that “sense” may be given implies that “sense” depends on one’s decision to give it to an item, on the model of labelling an entity. This is what Wittgenstein invites us to reconsider in the *Tractatus*, for he does not presuppose that logic could be an author (TLP, 4.312).

Notably, the requirement of the determinacy of sense in the *Tractatus* is neither meant, as proposed by Kant (1998, pp. 553; A572-B600), to bear on “things” nor, as proposed by Frege (1979, p. 155), on “boundaries of concepts”. Rather, Wittgenstein suggests that accounting for the determinacy of what is meant in ordinary situations cannot involve questioning whether anything is meant. Otherwise, everything would be as if the intelligibility of what one can attempt to account for was tied to how one accounts for it. Accordingly, the intelligibility of any account would depend *only* on someone’s decisions.

What requires explanation is why Wittgenstein equates the possibility of “simple signs” with requiring the determinacy of sense. Simple signs are defined in 3.201 as elements of a completely analysed proposition. In 3.2, they are further assimilated to the elements of the propositional sign corresponding to the objects involved in a thought and which can be expressed in a proposition. Wittgenstein says that simple signs are meant to be called “names” when used in a proposition (TLP, 3.202) and further specifies that they stand for (*verttritt*) objects (TLP, 3.22). Combined with others, objects involved in states of affairs are characterized in 2.021: they form the “substance of the world” (*die Substanz der Welt*). At this stage, their having such a role explains their being characterized as “simple” in 2.02. Wittgenstein then remarks that if the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true. As a result, it would be impossible to sketch a picture of the world (*Bild der Welt*), whether true or false (TLP, 2.0212).

Explaining this remark involves questioning the relevance of an infinite regress: once it is admitted that the sense of a proposition (“p”) could lie in the truth of second proposition (“q”), then the sense of “q” could lie in the truth of a third proposition (“r”), whose sense could lie in another proposition and so on. It would be as if no proposition could depict. Thus, 3.23 invites the reader to distinguish the evaluation of the truth from the evaluation of the sense of a proposition. A question which bears on the truth of a proposition differs from a question which bears on the meaningfulness of a string of signs. To confuse the two introduces an appearance of indeterminacy which cannot be dispelled and which requires a principle to exclude it.

However, the scenario according to which the sense of propositions could be indeterminate is *not* presented in a contrastive way: “it is clear that however different from the real one an imagined world may be, it must have something – a form – in common with the real one” (TLP, 2.022). This form is characterized as the “fixed” (*feste*) one of objects (TLP, 2.023).

This accounts for the deflationary character of Wittgenstein’s affirmation of the availability of a single complete analysis of each proposition (TLP, 3.25). This affirmation is echoed in 4.122: “it is obvious that the analysis of propositions must bring us to elementary propositions which consist of names in immediate combination”. The motive for the later affirmation can be considered by exposing the inanity of a counterfactual scenario: if the world were infinitely complex, it nevertheless would have to comprise objects and states of affairs (TLP, 4.2211). To affirm the irreducibility of objects and states of affairs can be taken as a claim concerning the world if and only if we regard introduced means as able to describe it in a way we could not specify. Nevertheless, the independence of the world from our notations has earlier been emphasized. The irreducibility of facts and states of affairs can thus be understood as a counterpart of providing an adequate notation concerning the logic of depiction (TLP, 4.015).

Indeed, if the end-terms of the analysis of a proposition could depend on the truth of another one, then the risk of indeterminacy that has been dispelled concerning propositions could resurface at the level of elementary propositions. By contrast, conceiving the end-terms of the analysis as elementary propositions consisting in immediate concatenations of names (TLP, 4.22) in which objects “hang one in another, like the links of a chain” (TLP, 2.03) does *not* imply indeterminacy. In one chain, all links are dependent on each other. Yet each link

counts as a link independent of the chain of which it is part (i.e., each one could be used to constitute other chains). Consequently, reducing a chain to its constitutive links does not involve reducing all chains in which those links could be used to its constitutive elements. On the contrary, it suffices to have one chain to be able to distinguish its constitutive links. Accordingly, the connection between the requirement of the determinacy of sense and the existence of one and only one complete analysis of each proposition can be spelled out: given any adequate notation, only the mere possibility of a unique complete analysis for each proposition is required. So it is unsurprising that simple signs turn out to be words in 4.026.

Requiring that sense is determinate is not so much an obstacle as an invitation to both require and provide helpful means. By contrast, inasmuch as logic is involved, in case it is taken for a universal medium, the attribution of mistakes to it is unhelpful: “Logic must take care of itself. A *possible* sign must also be able to signify. Everything which is possible in logic is also permitted” (TLP, 5.473). If someone yields to the temptation of imputing an illogical use of signs (or a logical mistake), then that one presupposes that one is entitled to differentiate between licit and illicit uses of signs. However, the counterpart of such a move is that the limits of the expressions of our thoughts are taken for limitations. Nonsense would result from the transgression of such limitations rather than from not having given a meaning to *some* constituent parts (and not to a whole) of a would-be proposition, i.e. to a string of signs (TLP, 5.473).

However, this is the view that the *Tractatus* invites us to come to terms with: “every possible proposition is legitimately constructed” (TLP, 5.4733). Requiring the autonomy of logic does not involve acknowledging that one is conceivably restricted by ordinary expressions. The *Tractatus* suggests, rather, that it really is up to anyone who engages in logic to make sure that the rules for operating with signs that she implements are appropriate to the scale of what she projects to account for:

5.475 - It is only a matter of constructing (*zu bilden*) a system of signs of a determinate number of dimensions – of a [determinate] (*bestimmten*) mathematical [manifoldness] (*Mannigfaltigkeit*). (Translation modified)

This approach is meant to provide means to realize that an *a priori* hierarchizing of the forms of elementary propositions is inconceivable (TLP, 5.556). One can anticipate the results of what one construes, which precludes the

conceivability of an ordering of elementary propositions into classes. A classification of elementary propositions could not be “pre-shaped” or “dictated” by an *a priori* set of ordered concepts. Applying logic surely involves grasping what one does. However, to require this for oneself does not suggest that anything could be “transformed” by what one thereby does (TLP, 5.557). If it is not possible to specify elementary propositions *a priori*, then wishing to specify them must lead to obvious nonsense (TLP, 5.5571).

I have attempted to show that 5.61 perfects the criticism of would-be attempts to rule on our language-uses. This is shown by the unhelpfulness of contrasting what can with what could not be referred to. That one may point to something in space not only involves the possibility of this place in space being occupied, but also that this place is effectively occupied. What one can point to manifests that what, on reflexion, can be thought, is the actual holding of a possibility. Doing so does not preclude the possibility that disagreements and misunderstandings may occur with respect to the designatum of an indexical (for different dimensions of an object can be evaluated, such as size, colour, texture, etc.). Rather, the very intelligibility of such disagreements and misunderstandings rests on our ability to designate things by means of indexicals like “this”. The implementation of logical notations implies our past appropriation of ordinary language. It can be granted that logical notations do not depend on ordinary language, but it is not necessary to admit that they could provide grounds to impose strictures on ordinary language.

The difficulty is that, on the one hand, the viewpoint of Wittgenstein’s contemporaries’ approach to logic suggests that strictures would need to be imposed on sense.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, solipsism seems to call the possibility of agreement into question. Our difficulty can be stated: can an agreement which neither disqualifies ordinary language nor makes undue concession to solipsism nevertheless be reached?

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Sullivan’s account of Wittgenstein’s criticism of Russell (2002, pp. 55-56).

### 3.2. “To what Extent is Solipsism a Truth?”

In this section, I will argue that the issue raised by solipsism can be settled to the extent that it contains a core of truth that it is perfectly adequate to appropriate. At the beginning of this chapter, I sketched a new reading of Wittgenstein’s approach to the question of solipsism. As an important point of controversy, I singled out the issue of whether solipsism can be ascribed to Wittgenstein. As indicated earlier, Hacker reads Wittgenstein’s approach to “the Mystical” (TLP, 6.44-6.45; 6.522) as playing a cardinal role in the *Tractatus* and proposes to read this work as an expression of “transcendental solipsism” (Hacker, 1986, p. 215). Diamond (2011, pp. 240; 261-263) suggests, on the contrary, that Wittgenstein criticizes solipsism in the *Tractatus* and questions an attitude of resignation with respect to the limits of language. Friedlander (2014, pp. 62-64) suggests that Wittgenstein criticizes solipsism in the *Tractatus* but that “the truth in solipsism” encapsulates the task of “realizing the self as the capacity to agree with the world expressed as ‘the world is my world’”.

While studying Sartre’s approach, I addressed the suggestion that the difficulties posed by solipsism are irreducible to the correct identification or ascription of intention to someone. Instead, Sartre proposes a characterization of the felt counterpart of an attitude that he also calls “blindness with respect to others” after having rejected a categorical approach to the other. On this approach, identifying someone could be accounted for in terms of the correct belonging of individuals to a category. I attempted to show in part 3.1. that the beginning of the section of solipsism in the *Tractatus* consists of a criticism of *a priori* categorical approaches to world and language. I now suggest that the criticism of the *a priori* categorical understanding of others is a common aspect of Sartre’s and Wittgenstein’s approaches to solipsism. Wittgenstein’s approach involves confronting a difficulty that calls into question the relevance of an ordering of different versions of solipsism.<sup>43</sup> Consider this section:

5.62 - This remark provides [the] (*den*) key to the question, to what extent (*inwieweit*) solipsism is a truth.

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<sup>43</sup> If it is true that Wittgenstein calls into question the possibility of “sorts” of solipsism, then it probably also calls into question whether we can distinguish “types” (Johnstone, 1991, p. 1991) of solipsism.

In fact what solipsism *means*, is quite correct, only it cannot be said, but it shows itself (*zeigt sich*).

That the world is *my* world, shows itself in, that the limits of language (the language which only I understand) mean the limits of my world. (Translation modified)

Wittgenstein suggests that there are appropriate means (the key) to settle the question “to what extent solipsism is a truth”. This involves (linguistic) means which have been construed on the model of ordinary locks built by somebody. This question can be rephrased as: “to what extent is solipsism a truth?” However, performing such operations on signs would not presuppose that an answer could and should be provided to this question. This would require granting that the question is meaningful as it stands. Rather, whether the string of signs displays any sense, and thereby whether there is any question awaiting an answer, could be what Wittgenstein calls into question. It is worth recalling in this context the assertion made in 4.003 that most propositions and questions written about philosophical matters are not false, but senseless.

If, then, the question raised in 5.62 is rhetorical, the usefulness of its written expression could reside in providing a means for determining the stakes of answers to the question “to what extent is solipsism is a truth?” Doing so would neither suggest that solipsism is meaningful nor “render it unthinkable”, as in Sartre’s early attempt to provide “the sole possible refutation to solipsism”; rather, it enables us to measure what we are committing ourselves to when we linguistically call into question the existence of other minds.

Within the classical approach, I could call into question the existence of other minds by doubting the existence of the world. I will attempt to explain the shift in Wittgenstein’s way of addressing solipsism at the beginning of the twentieth century. In ordinary situations, in order to measure an extent, I need a rule. With respect to solipsism, as suggest the *Notebooks*, the difficulty is the assumption of one’s alleged duty to judge, report and measure irrespective of any past:

What has history to do with me? Mine is the first and only world!  
I want to report how I found the world.  
I have to judge the world, to measure things. (NB, 2.9.16)

According to the attitude characterized by Wittgenstein, one would simply assume that one could judge the world (as a whole), measure things (somehow altogether) by presupposing that one could have an ability to do so that no one

else could have (that one could have had legitimately inherited from oneself, as it were). So if the question raised in 5.62 by Wittgenstein is taken as a challenge bearing on one's ability to decide on its meaningfulness, thus admitting that it could be meaningful, then the following gap seems to open: either I can decide or I cannot decide on the extent to which solipsism is a truth.

Inasmuch as I assume my unsettledness with respect to the meaningfulness of such a choice, two approaches were available. I can assume that I can or cannot decide of the truth of solipsism, for solipsism could be partially true (the discovery of its partial truth would then be an event whose probability could be envisaged). Or I can assume that I can or cannot decide on the truth of solipsism, for solipsism could not have been partially true.

If I assume I cannot decide on the truth of solipsism, then, on reflexion, I had two options. In the first, I assume that I was unable to make such a decision, for I assumed that solipsism is partially true and that the discovery of its partial truth is an event I could have envisaged. Thereby I granted that my thoughts are hostage to facts, and that other options could have lacked, for I cannot verify this probability. In this case, I assumed I could have been partly false with respect to my decision in a way that could have depended on facts and could not have been established. Then, I would have assumed that the eventuality of a mismatch between my representations and the world could have been unavoidable. It could *always* be possible that my representations could be false. But then, I assume that truth is inherently vague and admit gradations.

In the second option, I assumed that I was unable to take such a decision, for I assumed that solipsism is partially true and that it never has been a mere possibility. Thereby I admitted that I can be unfair to facts and that it is an option. In this case, I assumed I am partially true with respect to my decision in a way that depended on facts and could not be established. Then, I assumed that the eventuality of a harmony between my representations and the world is necessary. It could *always* be possible that my representations could be true. But then, I would assume that facts could be inherently vague and admit gradations.

This disjunction between two ways of remaining unsettled with respect to the issue raised by solipsism mirrors the difficulty tied to the implicit reliance on the analogy with the visual field as a model for reflexion. I suggest that this difficulty is similar to Sartre's concern with "mineness" in *Being and Nothingness*. That is to say, were I to acknowledge on reflexion that my relations to others

depend solely on how I represent those relations to myself (from a “theoretical” or “exclusive perspective”), then I could come to question the independence of the world from my will. Could I will this at all?

To address this tension, I will first return in part 3.2.1. to the manner in which Wittgenstein introduces his approach to images before they are assimilated to images of reality (TLP, 4.01). His approach dissolves the double difficulty of an alleged unavoidable mismatch between one’s representations and the world, as well as an alleged necessary harmony between one’s representations and the world. I will suggest that these two opposed fictions are to be dismissed in order to account for the role of the section on solipsism in the *Tractatus* (before Wittgenstein’s appeal to recognizing the nonsensicality of his propositions in 5.62). Then, I will turn in part 3.2.2. to the fiction considered by Wittgenstein in 5.62, that of “the language that [alone] I understand” (TLP, 5.62; translation modified), in order to stress that Wittgenstein invites the solipsist to focus on the public dimension of our uses of language.

Wittgenstein does apparently suggest, in a transitional way (i.e., before his invitation to recognize the nonsensicality of his propositions in 6.54), that the possessive determiner “my” can be applied to “world” (TLP, 5.6; 5.63) rather than to “my-representation-of-the-world” (e.g., as Schopenhauer suggests). In order to suggest the relevance of such a step, I will return, in section 3.2.1., to Wittgenstein’s assimilation of propositions to images of reality in 4.01 and suggest that his approach provides the means of avoiding both an unavoidable mismatch and a necessary harmony between one’s representations and the world. I will suggest in section 3.2.2. that Wittgenstein, by considering the fiction of “the language that only I understand” (TLP, 5.62), invites the solipsist to focus on and acknowledge the public dimension of appropriation in the use of language. The public character of language excludes that there could be an ineluctable disagreement between someone’s conception of the world and one’s expressions.

### 3.2.1. Pictures and Reality

If the question “to what extent solipsism is a truth?” is taken as bearing on one’s ability to decide, through reflexion, whether it can count as a question, then a double concern arises. On the one hand, it raises the issue of an unavoidable mismatch between one’s representations and the world, the opposite of which

leads to assuming the possibility that one's thought could be hostage to facts. On the basis of such an approach, some facts could compel one to think in some way, although one would be vaguely uncertain about being compelled to think in that way. On the other hand, it could raise the issue of a necessary harmony between one's representations and the world, the opposite of which leads to assuming a would-be permission for facts to be taken hostage by one's thought. On the basis of such an approach, one's mind might discount facts in some way, although one would be vaguely uncertain about whether facts could be discounted in that way. If I consider these two possibilities, which immediately raise the collective dimension of the issues raised by solipsism, I do so while recognizing that criticizing the relevance of the use of the image of tribunals in philosophical contexts is not tantamount to discounting the intelligibility of the practices involved in tribunals. Already in the *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein has taken one of those practices to exemplify his conception of propositions:

In the proposition a world is as it were put together experimentally. (As when in the law-court in Paris a motor-car accident is represented by means of dolls, etc.) (NB, 29.9.14)

Wittgenstein alludes to the use of dolls to represent accidents in order to evaluate responsibilities in tribunals. Inasmuch as dolls provide a collective means enabling us to represent an accident, they allow us to survey and follow a public procedure that suffices to evaluate a case. (This point shall be further developed in the present section). For now, although for all the reasons we considered earlier Wittgenstein does not grant that philosophy could and should be concerned with legislating on sense, the above quoted passage shows plainly that he nevertheless thinks that our approach to language should not present fewer dimensions than the practices involved in tribunals.

I suggest that this aspect of Wittgenstein's approach to propositions should be taken into account in order to read the section on solipsism in the *Tractatus*. That is to say, Wittgenstein apparently suggests, in a transitional way, that the possessive "my" can be used with "world" (TLP, 5.6; 5.63) rather than with my-representation-of-the-world. This is a step which, I suggest, enables dispelling the unsettledness that can occur in reflexion on solipsism. That is to say, Wittgenstein considered the possibility of someone becoming confused with respect to their inhabitation of their world, rather than "some" world (that is, one among others).

However, Wittgenstein does not presuppose that such uncertainty would require relying on an alleged law of third-middle in order to exclude, as it were, the very possibility of vagueness, a position tied to his implicit rejection of the appeal to logic as an arbiter that could be appointed to resolve conflicts of opinion. These elements are, I suggest, crucial for addressing the issue of solipsism in the way Wittgenstein puts forward, that is, by providing the means to settle the question “to what extent solipsism is a truth?”

For this reason, I will return to the way in which Wittgenstein introduces his approach to images prior to the assimilation of propositions to images of reality in 4.01, in order to show that his approach is designed to dissolve concerns with respect to our ability to represent the world to ourselves by means of language (as much in the approach of a transcendental idealism as in the approach of metaphysical realism).

In part 3.1.1., I proposed reading the sections prior to the assimilation of the world to the whole of reality in 2.063 as arguing that, *pace* both transcendental idealism and metaphysical realism, our use of the concept of world does not presuppose acknowledging a limitation. The commentary I proposed stopped at the assimilation of the world to the whole of reality in 2.063.

The section on pictures starts with: “we make to ourselves pictures of facts” (TLP, 2.1.). Insofar as no argument is provided by Wittgenstein, 2.1 could be taken as a rather superfluous and idealist demand of realism or as a necessary and realist demand of idealism. In any case, it can also be taken as engaging with a concern that could be voiced in connection with an idealist approach at this stage: that of how we can dispel the vague uncertainty about whether we are lacking the means to picture to ourselves all the facts that correspond to the states of affairs that hold and together are the world. If we could have been lacking those means, then we could have been condemned to an unavoidable mismatch between our representations and the world.

2.13 provides a key to solving this difficulty: to the objects correspond in the picture, the elements of this picture. That is, to the determinate concatenations of objects in states of affairs (TLP, 2.031-2.032) correspond determinate concatenations of elements in pictures: “The picture consists in that its elements are combined with one another in a determinate way” (TLP, 2.14). To each object of a state of affairs corresponds an element which stands for it (*vertreten*) in the proposition that depicts it (TLP, 2.1511). The picture may

thereby be assimilated to a fact (TLP, 2.141). A fact is characterized by its ability to present (*stellt*) facts in logical space, the holding or not of states of affairs (TLP, 2.11). Thereby, it can be equated with a model of reality (*Modell der Wirklichkeit*) (TLP, 2.12). The determinate combination of elements composing a picture can be used to present (*stellt*) determinate combinations of things (TLP, 2.15). That a picture can present combinations of things rather than represent them should be noted: a picture can present a combination whose possibility was previously unknown to someone. That is to say, room is left for novelty (which obviously does not imply that every picture presents an unknown possibility).

The *structure* of a picture is the connection among its elements, and the *form of depiction* of a picture (*Form der Abbildung*) is the possibility of this structure (TLP, 2.15). With this distinction, Wittgenstein inverts the direction of the argument. What is required by a picture to count as a fact is that which is questioned at this stage: "In order *to be a picture*, a fact must have something in common with what it pictures" (TLP, 2.16).

What a picture must have in common with reality if it is to be a fact is the form of depiction (TLP, 2.16-2.17). This does not involve any restriction with respect to what a picture can depict. Using the same examples as in 2.0131, Wittgenstein specifies that the picture can represent every reality whose form it has (spatial objects, coloured objects, etc.). Nevertheless, the form of depiction cannot itself be depicted by a proposition. Rather, the form of depiction is shown forth by the image (TLP, 2.172).

Wittgenstein further distinguishes between the form of depiction (*form der Abbildung*) and the form of representation (*form der Darstellung*) of a picture. The latter is the standpoint of the picture, a standpoint from outside the object of the picture (TLP, 2.173). The form of depiction is the possibility of the connection among the elements of a picture in a determinate way, but the standpoint of that picture on its object is its form of representation. A picture cannot either depict its form of depiction (TLP, 2.172) or stand outside its form of representation (TLP, 2.174).

Wittgenstein connects the correctness of the presentation of an object by a picture to its form of representation (TLP, 2.173). The relevance of this distinction can be explained as follows: it is insofar as a picture conveys its form of depiction that its displaying a form of representation can be called into question (e.g., did I ever see the state of affairs this picture depicts?). We have seen that a

picture conveys the possibility that objects can be combined in a state of affairs in a determinate way. To depict determinately a state of affairs requires that the depicting fact shares with the depicted fact a form, which is the form of depiction. Conversely, for a state of affairs to be depicted requires the depicting fact to be *distinct* from the depicted fact. The image has a form of *representation*, that is, it stands for a determinate combination of elements with which it cannot be identical. This in turn enables determination of whether it represents its object either correctly or falsely. The question of whether a depicting fact (the picture) depicts the depicted fact (the state of affairs it represents) correctly can be posed if and only if a depicting fact (a picture and thereby a proposition) is considered.

The distinction between the form of depiction and the form of representation matters when confronting the issue of solipsism, for it enables us to account for the independence of possibilities, which are the medium of representation (Friedlander, 2001, p. 55) and which could not be affected by anyone.

A requirement concerning pictures can thus be spelled out in 2.18: for any picture to be able to depict reality, it must share its logical form (*die logische Form*), that is, the form of reality (*die Form der Wirklichkeit*). If the form of depiction is logical, then the picture is a logical picture (TLP, 2.181). This does not involve any restriction with respect to the ability of pictures to depict reality. To distinguish logical pictures is not to distinguish them *from* allegedly “non-logical” pictures. Rather, Wittgenstein questions what is reflexively required for a picture to determinately depict a fact. If a picture depicts, then it is a determinate combination of elements with a logical form or form of reality in common with a determinate combination of objects in a state of affairs that could hold. To this extent, saying of a picture that it is logical is not asserting that pictures are things which fall under the “logical”. Rather, it is to say that every picture is a logical one (TLP, 2.182) and can depict the world (TLP, 2.19).

Wittgenstein can thus account as much for the independence of pictured facts as for the autonomy of the picturing ones: “the picture has the logical form of [depiction] (*logische Form der Abbildung*) in common with what it [depicts] (*dem Abgebildeten*)” (translation modified, TLP, 2.2). Insofar as an image shows the possibility of combining elements in a determinate way, whether the depicted fact holds is independent of the depicting fact. However, inasmuch as an image depicts elements combined in a determinate way, the image depicts the

possibility of a fact independent of its holding or not. What a picture *depicts* is the possibility of a holding state of affairs (TLP, 2.201). What it *presents* to the one who sees it is that one has imagined a possible situation within logical space (TLP, 2.202).

The counterpart of the independence of pictures from states of affairs is the dependence of their truth or falsity on reality: the distinction between the false and the true cannot conceivably apply to pictures irrespective of everything else (TLP, 2.224). If the truth of a picture is questioned on the basis of its agreement with reality (i.e., “does the state of affairs depicted by the picture hold?”), then recognizing (*erkennen*) its truth or falsity involves a comparison with reality (TLP, 2.223). Thereby, as a comparison with reality is involved in the recognition of the truth or falsity of that which is depicted by a proposition, there is no such thing as an image which is true *a priori* (TLP, 2.225).

Wittgenstein here highlights the internal limit of an *a priori* conception of investigation. It is nothing less than a central pivot to the Kantian enterprise which is thus called into question. In the introduction of the *First Critique*, *a priori* knowledge is equated with knowledge which is absolutely independent of any experience (Kant, 1998, p. 137; B4). By contrast, in the *Tractatus*, by rejecting that it is conceivable to determine *a priori* the truth or falsity of an image, Wittgenstein rejects the idea that knowledge can be acquired *a priori*. If anything is to be argued against Kant, it is that knowledge is acquired *a posteriori*. That Wittgenstein questions the very conceivability of *a priori* investigation is plain in 3.04: “a correct *a priori* thought would be one whose possibility guaranteed its truth”. Such a thought would need to be one whose truth could be evaluated without any conceivable “object of comparison” (TLP, 3.05). According to this approach, if an investigation can provide any knowledge, then it is not *a priori*. And if anything is done *a priori*, then it cannot and need not be an investigation.

Thus, the possibility of an unavoidable mismatch between one’s representations and the world has been dispelled. Inasmuch as one can imagine determinately *one* fact, one has the means to represent to oneself *any* of the facts that correspond to holding states of affairs and that together are the world. That is to say, I cannot assume any longer that the discovery of the partial truth of solipsism is an event whose probability I could have envisaged, due to my inability to verify it. My thought could not have been solely dependent on facts in any

sense. The eventuality of an unavoidable mismatch between my representations and the world was a fiction.

However, this approach can be judged to be a rather excessive and idealist demand of realism or as a rather superfluous and realist demand of idealism. That is to say, in a transcendental idealist approach, or in a purely realist approach, it can seem that dispelling the fiction of an unavoidable mismatch between one's representations and the world commits one to the opposed fiction: namely, that of a necessary harmony between one's representations and reality. The questions that should be addressed is then what can establish that facts suffice to express whatever one wishes to express? How can we dispel the vague uncertainty that we are not lacking the means to express 'all' that we could imagine, that is, all the facts that correspond to holding states of affairs and which altogether are the world?

Section 3 of the *Tractatus*, I suggest, answers such concerns. It starts with the assimilation of the logical picture of the fact (*Das logische Bild der Tatsachen*) to the thought (*der Gedanke*). Wittgenstein immediately suggests that thinking a state of affairs is literally making a picture of it (TLP, 3.001). A picture of the world (*ein Bild der Welt*) is the totality of true thoughts (TLP, 3.01). This accounts for the possibility of several pictures of the world without either precluding their distinctness (which would involve the relevance of dogmatism) or presupposing their incommensurability (which would involve the relevance of relativism). Accounting for their commensurability requires inverting the traditional conception of the relation between the possible and the thinkable (as Sartre does; cf. BN, 28-29; 105). We do not have to extract the conditions of possibility which compel thought in an unbeknownst way. Rather, what can be thought is possible (TLP, 3.02): it is the conditions of intelligibility that require reflexion, inasmuch as we cannot think illogically (TLP, 3.03). Accounting for the way in which a determinate thought can be perceptibly expressed by means of a proposition (TLP, 3.1) therefore suffices to render explicit that we can dispel the alleged eventuality of being unable to express whatever we might wish to express. If it is possible to express determinately one thought by means of a fact, then that any thought can be expressed by means of a fact will be rendered clear.

Wittgenstein calls the sign by means of which a thought can be expressed a propositional sign (TLP, 3.12). That is to say, abstracted from its projective relation to the world, the proposition is a propositional sign. Considered in its

projective relation to the world, the propositional sign is a proposition. The upshot of 3.14 is to render explicit that the propositional sign is a fact. Wittgenstein presents ordinary forms of expression, whether written or printed, as blurring the way in which the propositional sign is a fact (TLP, 3.143). He suggests that in a printed proposition, a proposition-sign (*Satzzeichen*) is not seen in a way that differs from the word. He furthermore suggests that this absence of notational difference between a proposition-sign and a word is what enables Frege to call the proposition a compounded name (*zusammengesetzten Namen*).

At this stage, Wittgenstein implicitly confronts two conceptions: Frege's conception of propositions as proper names of truth-values conceived as objects,<sup>44</sup> and Russell's conception of facts as involving the existence of objects of acquaintance with either one or several entities.<sup>45</sup> He then provides a key to dissolving difficulties rising from treating propositions as correlatives of "internal" images (Frege, 1966, p. 61) or as correlated to "external" entities (as for Russell):

3.14 - The propositional sign (*Satzzeichen*) consists in the fact that its elements, the words, [stand] (*verhalten*) in it in a [determinate] (*bestimmte*) way. / The propositional sign is a fact (*Tatsache*).  
(Translation modified)

Facts or determinate combinations of objects in states of affairs (TLP, 2.031-2.032), can be *depicted* with determinate combinations of elements (TLP, 2.13-2.14) and *expressed* with propositional signs, which are facts consisting in determinate combinations of words (TLP, 3.14). Wittgenstein's diagnosis with

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<sup>44</sup> A clear expression of early Frege's (1966, p. 65) view on this point is the following: "By the truth value of a sentence I understand the circumstance that it is true or false. There are no further truth values. For brevity I call the one the True, the other the False. Every declarative sentence concerned with the reference of its words is therefore to be regarded as a proper name, and its reference, if it has one, is either the True or the False. The two objects are recognized, if only implicitly, by everybody who judges something to be true – and so even by a sceptic".

<sup>45</sup> According to early Russell's "logical atomism": (i) in response to sceptical arguments we should maintain that our knowledge *of* the external world is *based* solely upon our acquaintance with sense-data somehow related to particular entities (1914, p. 71); (ii) our knowledge *about* the external world based on acquaintance with meanings rather than sense-data would enable us to pass beyond the limits of our private experience (2009, p. 198); (iii) what lies beyond those limits – and thus the external world – is reducible to independent and simple entities from which facts can be formed when related to each other. Facts are complexes or molecular when involving several entities. Facts are simple or atomic when involving one and only one simple entity (2003, pp. 91-96); and (iv) correlatively, Russell claims that we can obviously "see" that other people's mind are not directly perceived (1905, p. 480). Indeed, what we know *about* others minds, as with physical objects, is tied to acquaintance with the contents of our minds or *introspection* (2009, p. 193).

respect to conceptions of propositional signs which do not treat them as facts is that they fail to account for the significance of the spatial positions of the signs composing a propositional sign. This failure undermines the idealist explanation of seen spatial relations inasmuch as it cannot account for the multiplicity of these relations (TLP, 4.0412).

This does not imply that the relations of signs are reducible to spatial ones. But it does imply that the spatial relations of the signs composing a propositional sign contribute to the sense of complex signs in determinate ways. To account for this, Wittgenstein suggests the following:

3.1431 — The [essence] (*das Wesen*) of the propositional sign becomes very clear when we imagine it made up of spatial objects (such as tables, chairs, books) instead of written signs. (Translation modified)

Wittgenstein invites his readers to imagine a situation by using spatial objects in place of the names of objects one ordinarily uses. This procedure is similar to the previously described practice of using dolls in a tribunal to represent a situation publicly. This immediately implies that not every configuration of spatial objects would be relevant to representing the relations of the objects depicted by a given proposition. Any change in the positions of the spatial objects used in place of names of objects contained in a proposition would involve different imagined situations. Finding a relevant positioning of the spatial objects standing for names of objects involved in a given proposition is tantamount to finding a way of saying with spatial objects what is pictured by means of that given proposition. To imagine such a situation suffices to bring out that the spatial or external relations of the signs standing for objects in a propositional sign determinately contribute to the expression of relations internal to objects in imagined situations. Although the convention is specified arbitrarily, the determinacy of what it permits expressing does not depend on its user. In section 4, Wittgenstein suggests that this convention can be used to form propositions and evaluate reality (TLP, 4.023).

This suggestion clarifies his earlier assimilation of a picture to a scale (*Maßstab*) when it is applied to reality (TLP, 2.1512). After having read a proposition, one can fix reality, that is to say, determine whether the depicted fact holds by evaluating it against the yardstick of the depicting fact considered. Thus, one can provide to oneself the answer to a determinate question that one poses to oneself when considering a depicting state of affairs (i.e., a proposition).

If the depicted state of affairs holds, then it is a positive fact. If the depicted state of affairs does not hold, then it is a negative fact. Obviously, the positive answer (yes) does not amount to the correct answer any more than the negative answer (no) amounts to the incorrect one.

Thus, the eventuality of a necessary harmony between one's representations and the world is dispelled. Inasmuch as one can express determinately *one* fact, one cannot be short of the means to express to others *any* fact that corresponds to a holding states of affairs, which taken together are the world. Furthermore, one can question and provide to oneself independent responses with respect to any fact in a way that does not depend on one and only one individual. Thus, I cannot assume any longer that the discovery of the whole truth of solipsism could be an event whose probability I could have envisaged, for I could have been unable to verify it. Facts could not have been solely dependent on my thoughts in any sense. The eventuality of a necessary harmony between my representations and the world was a fiction.

I have tried so far to show that the difficulty raised by Wittgenstein in 5.62 with respect to solipsism can thus be solved. Someone cannot willingly deny the independence of the world in any sense. The reading I have proposed of Wittgenstein so far is thus independent of any fact, but it is also compatible with the intelligibility of any of them. Anyone can represent to themselves that some facts differ from what they imagine, and anyone can say to themselves that some facts should be acknowledged. The question of "to what extent solipsism is a truth?" cannot bear on one's ability to decide on it. No more but no less can be foreseen. And this surely matters with respect to the issue of solipsism, for arbitrariness is involved in the implementing of notations. To this extent a (public) dimension of conventionality is involved in language, even at the level of an impersonal representation of the world by means of completely generalized propositions.

However, with solipsism, it is one's willingness to decide by oneself and, thereby, one's commitment to one's world which is at stake. Could I report, judge and measure an alleged absence of the world or of any past?

As stated earlier, the classical approach is supposed to enable me to call into question the existence of other minds by questioning the existence of the world. What I assume to be dispelled at this stage is the relevance of such a scenario. The past acknowledgement of the existence of other minds is

presupposed by any questioning concerning one's "singling out" of oneself from them. It could not have been true that other minds did not exist.

This immediately raises the question, then, of how to understand the idea that "what solipsism means, is quite correct, only it cannot be said but it shows itself"? At this stage of the *Tractatus*, this explicitly suggests that solipsism contains a core of truth.

As a reminder, Sartre suggested that attempts to refute solipsism lead us to reproduce the difficulty from which solipsism stems. Inasmuch as alleged doubts with respect to the existence of the world or other minds cannot be grounded in experience, his "theory of the existence of other minds" is best conceived as conceptual means to dispel the appearance of doubt with respect to the existence of others minds (and thus irreducible to an alleged "proof of the existence of others"). Now, with Wittgenstein, we considered that our medium (language) could not depend on one user at the exclusion of another, and that it is internal to it to display that which has been meant by an author, even eventually contrary to one's self-ascribed intentions. On reflexion, the inconceivability of proof of the existence of others minds mirrors the inconceivability of a refutation of the inexistence of others minds.

This is to say that our medium, language, will eventually show, even against one's self-ascribed intentions of providing such proof, one's unsettlement with the existence of other minds. Inasmuch as it could not have been the case for someone to be the only one there is, on occasion it can be said that one acted as if one were the only one (nothing new; rather something any language-user knew already). Nevertheless, there is no such thing as (intentionally) showing (as when someone shows to someone else a picture) that solipsism is inconceivable. This would commit one to providing the counterexample of what one could have wished to establish.

Not to take solipsism to be raising a meaningful question does not thereby involve making a decision on what "solipsism" can come to mean at one's expense, particularly in its linguistic manifestation, as the doctrine according to which one alone could fix the limits of the thinkable. Sense does not await being decided. This does not mean that there are no limits to language, but rather that inasmuch as they could not have constrained anyone, it is up to one to situate oneself with respect to them by means of appropriate uses.

Nevertheless, that anyone could decide to “check” the “extent of the truth of solipsism” is surely not incidental in the *Tractatus*. To provide a reading of the section on solipsism requires accounting for its composition. As considered earlier, Wittgenstein apparently suggests, at least transitorily, that the possessive determiner “my” can be used with “world” (TLP, 5.6; 5.63) rather than with my-representation-of-the-world. Marking the difference between one’s world and “some” world could be significant, for if one did not mark it, then a possibility would apparently be excluded. As recently reemphasized by Friedlander (2014, p. 56), the ascription of solipsism to Wittgenstein is confusing. There is no reason why the author who suggests that “language disguises thought” and the possibility of the agreement of our purposes when attempting to gather its logic with the purposes for which language has been built could have set a trap. If 5.62 can be taken for a trap, it can also be taken as a linguistic means whose manifest indifference is the mark of its helpfulness.

### 3.2.2. “*The Language which only I understand*”

I have suggested that the problem apparently raised by solipsism can be solved, that our medium (language) cannot depend on one user at the exclusion of another, and that it is internal to language to show what is meant by an author, even contrary to one’s self-ascribed intentions. I also suggest that these three threads are involved in 5.62c:

5.62c —That the world is *my* world, shows itself in the fact that the limits of language (the language which only I understand) mean the limits of *my* world.

It is apparently with a fact that Wittgenstein presents the means for reflexion on the counterpart of one’s engagement with the fiction of a “language which only I understand”. If we grant that “the proposition *shows* its sense” (TLP, 4.022), then nothing precludes that 5.62c can be evaluated. That is to say, I assume that one can (reflexively) determine, as a step, whether what 5.62c shows could hold. If it holds, then it would be a positive fact; if it does not hold, then it would be a negative fact. The difficulty is obviously that if any relation between some facts that could concern me is suggested by 5.62c, a picture of my standing somewhere could hardly be relevant to posing to myself a determinate question with respect to my use of language. Rather, what 5.62c is calling into question is

whether I should allow a discrepancy between what I do not understand and what I mean to show by my expressions. Indeed, these expressions testify to the ways in which I appropriate language.

What this approach questions is whether our medium, language, could fail to manifest the detachment of a feeling of solitude (which can equally obtain when among others) and a situation of solitude (what cannot happen among others). In this respect, Friedlander (2001, p. 120) suggests that “the pronoun ‘my’ is crucial [...] in marking the fact that the range of possibilities always depends on the concrete use ‘I’ make of language”. He also says that “appropriation is the central determination of existence” (Friedlander, 2001, p. 118). These ideas call into question whether one’s relation to language can be understood on the model of one’s relation to property at all.

Notably, Wittgenstein does *not* suggest that one could *be* unintelligible, as if unintelligibility could be a state in which one could be and that one could be unable to escape. Rather, he seems to suggest that one may not realize what one means, irrespective of what one thinks oneself to mean. On given occasions, this could be the case. This is a possibility, I suggest, that 5.62c enables interrogating. My potential misunderstandings cannot and should not involve others. On the contrary, others could have understood what I meant on an occasion I can retrospectively have to reconsider.

If that is correct, then Wittgenstein suggests that one’s confusion in such a case mirrors the fact that one took one’s picture of the world for the sole picture that there could be of the world, in other words, by taking the limits of language to mean the limits of one’s world. This could hardly demote one’s responsibility with respect to one’s uses of language. *Could one mean at all* to show the contrary of what one means and mean the contrary of what one shows?

Projecting rather than getting used to the rule of projection allows us to surmount this difficulty: in order to mean, one uses language that has been appropriated. It is language used by someone, but certainly not one’s property. Sense cannot be “made”, for one could not have initiated a process from which “sense” could result. Thus, if I assume there could be a “language which only I understand”, then I would be confusing the public character of language with an obstacle to expression.

The confusion between solitude and unicity in solipsism can thus be dispelled as follows. To think about oneself implies one’s acknowledgement of the

uniqueness (i.e., the property of each and every individual) of individuals. Thinking to one's solitude could not have involved the discovery of a "state" that could have been proper to one. That is to say, to think solitude implies acknowledgement of one's potential presence to others, that which suffices to circumstantially determine whether one is alone or not. But a "specific unicity" is not, as it were, "realized" through solitude (or its linguistic practice). That is to say, thinking of being alone need not amount to thinking about the property of a unique object. Solitude cannot and need not be established in the abstract. Sense does not await being decided upon. It is exactly inasmuch as it is up to anyone *except* oneself to decide whether one acted *as if* one was the only one that it is also the case that no one but oneself can decide not to act as if one *was* the only one (nothing new; rather something any language-user knew already). It is inasmuch as it is not conceivable to decide on sense that it is intelligible that what solipsism means "shows itself". This does not imply that solipsism could be, as it were, rendered legitimate or desirable.

According to this approach, acknowledging the dimension of appropriation involved in the use of language by an individual is valuable in order to acknowledge that it is not hypothetical at all that individuals dispose of their will. An individual can stand with respect to the world in an appropriate relation, one that is to be conceived, which involves one's appropriation of the linguistic means to stand in such a relation to it. In the *Notebooks*, Wittgenstein addresses the difficulty raised by Schopenhauer's (2010, p. 23) formula: "the world is my representation". On the basis of such an approach, all that I could "have" of the world would be "representations", and a "willing subject" would be required to account for one's internal relation to the world from a unique impersonal standpoint because it would *a priori* remain beyond any conceivable reach. But there is no reason for this, as Wittgenstein suggests:

What kind of reason is there for the assumption of a willing subject? Is not *my world* adequate for individuation? (NB, 19.11.16)

Wittgenstein thus proposes in the *Tractatus* a radically new approach to addressing the issue raised by solipsism which implies appropriating the use of "world" but does not require acknowledgement of a mediation through representations. This approach finds its value in the indifference it marks with respect to the individuation of whom it can be helpful to. That is to say, that anyone should appropriate and use "world" in measured ways is obvious. It shows

itself by the stricture that foreseeably arises with respect to others to use it in unmeasured ways. In this respect, I suggest that Wittgenstein provides a means to neutralize the issue raised by solipsism through implementing a linguistic structure designed, among other things, to render manifest the denial of the existence of other minds implied in solipsism.

Wittgenstein indeed suggests that “world” and “life” can be assimilated to each other (TLP, 5.621). This suggestion comes close to that of Sartre, who affirms that the concept of “absolute objectivity” is tantamount to a “desert world” or “world without humans” (BN, 331). Wittgenstein’s suggestion is helpful in that it shows that the abstraction involved by an impersonal representation of the world does not imply that it would require being at odds with life. As he will put it later: “our ordinary language, which of all possible notations is the one which pervades all our life, holds our mind rigidly in one position, as it were, and in this position sometimes it feels cramped, having a desire for other positions as well” (Wittgenstein, 1998, p. 59). The expression of the position in which ordinary language can hold our mind rigidly could be contained in the affirmation that “I am my world. (The microcosm)” (TLP, 5.63). To acknowledge this does not imply opposing or submitting to anyone. That is to say, there is no basis for worry with respect to the possibility that the world that is thereby appropriated could be the world of someone else. The world is certainly not to be claimed, but neither should it be renounced.

The goal of this chapter was to call into question the conceivability of an exclusive perspective which could imply or preclude our potential confinement to representations. This involved considering whether such confinement would require acknowledgement from a perspective independent of experience and from whence the possible discrepancy between one’s representations and the world would need to be *ruled out*. But, inasmuch as the possibility of such mismatch could not be exceptional, that is, could not rule “by itself” as it were, it is at once superfluous and confusing to rule it out. Linguistic and shared means enabling us to express ourselves are available. Projecting rather than getting used to “the rule of projection” suffices to acknowledge that the issue raised by solipsism could not require any proof.

If it is granted that it is superfluous and misleading to exclude the possibility of confinement to our representations, then the question that remains to be addressed is whether it could have been possible to “discover oneself” as

solipsism implies one can. To do so, I will address in the last chapter two objections considered by Sartre and Wittgenstein. The first objection is that appropriating the language of the other presupposes the subordination of my language to that of the other. Does the subordination of my language to that of the other presuppose that what I can mean and do is restricted? The second objection is that I could attempt to discover myself in the world. Can I not attempt to express to myself that I have discovered myself to be metaphysically isolated? Can I not attempt to use language in a way that I could have inherited from myself?

## 4. Individuals in their Appropriative Relation to the World

The aim of this chapter is to show that Sartre and Wittgenstein establish both the superfluity and misleading nature of the ideas of self-discovery and self-inheritance implied by solipsism. A “self-discovery”, as I use this phrase, means a discovery that (1) is necessarily made by its discoverer (it cannot be made by another discoverer) and that (2) its discoverer can necessarily make (its discoverer could not fail to make it). A “self-discovery”, in this use, at once (2) essentially makes its discoverer and (1) is essentially made by that very same discoverer. Similarly, a “self-inheritance”, as I use this phrase, means an inheritance that (1) is necessarily legated to its inheritor (it cannot be inherited by another inheritor) and that (2) is necessarily inherited by its inheritor (it cannot be inherited from another inheritor). Thus, a “self-inheritance”, in this use, at once (2) essentially inherits its inheritor and (1) is essentially inherited by that very same inheritor.

Thus, if the solipsist could discover that he is the only person there could be, then no one but he could make such a discovery. And if the solipsist could report such a discovery, then no one but he could inherit the language to report such a discovery. The ideas of self-inheritance and self-discovery that solipsism implies would be essentially private, or they would be properties essential to one and only one individual. In this final chapter, I will question whether such ideas are required at all and suggest that holding on to them cannot but lead to confusion. That is to say, I will call into question whether the alleged events of “self-discovery” and “self-inheritance” could have happened.

Indeed, self-discovery, in which the placement of “self” prior to “discovery” underscores that one has discovered something by oneself, is intelligible, although it is redundant. It would be a way to mark that such a discovery differs from a discovery made by several persons together, or from a discovery that was rendered possible due to the help of someone else. Against the backdrop of a context where it would be pertinent to underscore that one has made a discovery by oneself it could be useful. However, the idea of self-discovery, as previously defined is, I suggest, targeted both Sartre and Wittgenstein, for it implies that an individual could be both the discoverer and the object of discovery of one single and same discovery. Similarly, “self-inheritance” in which the placement of “self” prior to “inheritance” can be used to underscore

that *a fortiori* the intervention of someone else not required in order to inherit a legacy could be used in some intricate context, although it would be redundant to do so. However, the idea of self-inheritance, as previously defined is, I suggest, targeted by both Sartre and Wittgenstein, for it implies that an individual could be legating and inheriting one single and same legacy.

At the end of the first chapter (cf. 1.2.3.), I suggested that Sartre and Wittgenstein's approaches to solipsism are compatible in that they criticize the conceivability of the idea of self-inheritance in relation to self-discovery.<sup>46</sup> Wittgenstein demonstrates that the nature of our medium, language, inevitably displays pretences related to adopting a perspective on all that is the case, which means that the criticism he provides of such a gesture is not conditional. Similarly, Sartre argues that it suffices to think conditionally in order to acknowledge the nature of freedom. In both cases, the difficulty presented by solipsism is that it suggests that the generalized absence of other minds, could be taken as a relevant basis for expression and action.

Addressing the issue of solipsism in the second chapter, I considered Sartre's proposed resolution of the theoretical problem of the existence of other minds, which retrospectively showed the inconceivability of proving their existence. In the third chapter, I considered Wittgenstein's way of settling the issue of solipsism, which shows that, on reflexion, the inconceivability of proving the existence of other minds mirrors the inconceivability of disproving the non-existence of others minds. Thus, neither of these possibilities is relevant. Nevertheless, inasmuch as they can be considered, at the end of the third chapter I spelled out two objections implied by the ideas of self-discovery and self-inheritance that solipsism presupposes, and which are yet to be addressed. The present chapter will address these objections by tracing the reliance on the analogy with visual field that they presuppose.

The first objection is that appropriating the language of the other presupposes the subordination of my language to that of the other. Does the subordination of my language in this manner presuppose that what I can say and do is restricted? In what sense can the indifference involved in Wittgenstein's invitation to consider that "I am my world" (TLP, 5.63) be relevant? One can *a*

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<sup>46</sup> The approach I propose here is indebted to Narboux (Narboux, Forthcoming) and Descombes (2014, pp. 189-192).

*posteriori* interrogate oneself concerning one's relations to others in terms of probability, and one can even retrospectively doubt the relevance of advice: does the possibility of marking off one's possibility of "being one's world" as distinct from someone else's not imply some restriction upon what can be meant and done in the first person? Can I not attempt to discover (see and judge) myself from the standpoint of the other?

The second objection is that I could attempt to discover myself in the world (i.e., all that is the case). One can attempt to *a priori* interrogate oneself in a way that would rule out the relevance of any advice: can I not attempt to express to myself that I have discovered myself in a way that could ground the idea of a metaphysical solitude, and that cannot be dispelled? Can I not attempt to use language in a way that I would have inherited from myself?

In section 4.1, I confront the first objection. I try to show that in Sartre's approach, appropriating the language of others does not imply a restrictive subordination of my language to theirs. It is, on the contrary, inasmuch as we use an appropriated language that we can agree and disagree with one another. To presuppose that I could be limited by the language of others amounts to presupposing that I could discover (see and judge) myself from the standpoint of another mind (by contrast with learning about myself from others). I will argue that such a presupposition is superfluous and misleading.

In section 4.2., I confront the second objection. I try to show that on Wittgenstein's approach, the discovery of the existence of the subject, as a "part" or "component" of the world (i.e., of all that is the case) belongs to the register of fiction. The event of "the discovery of the subject" could not happen because "the subject" could not appear in, or be missing from, the register of conceivable discoveries. If this is granted, then the idea of self-inheritance implied by solipsism can be dispensed with.

#### 4.1 The Aporia of the Relation to My Fellow

In this section, I try to show that, in Sartre's approach, appropriating the language of others does not imply a restrictive subordination of my language to that of others. I argue in section 4.1.1. that language is a collective technique that individuals share: in others words, that it is inherently public. Then, in section 4.1.2., I argue that appropriating the language of others does not imply that my

language is restrictively subordinated to theirs. It is superfluous and misleading to suppose the existence of “the Person” to confront the existence of “No-body”. Finally, in section 4.1.3., I argue that the limits of freedom are confused with restrictions if I presuppose that they are imposed upon me by others. However, this is not necessary. It is superfluous and misleading to presuppose that I could attempt to discover (see and judge) myself from the standpoint of the other.

#### 4.1.1. The Collective Ownership of Techniques

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre questions whether the public character of the linguistic and technical organizations that one can appropriate implies a limitation with respect to what one can mean and do. This amounts to asking the following question: if I appropriate the language of the other, is my language restrictively subordinated to theirs (BN, 540)?

This objection occasions a new aporia. The first aporia resided in the appearance that the heterogeneity of consciousness and world could cast doubt on their relation. But as consciousness and world are *de facto* related, the difficulty resided in accounting for consciousness’s internal relation to the world (in Sartre’s terms the complete whole of being). The second aporia resided in the appearance that the distinction between my consciousness and that of someone else could cast doubt on their relation. But as non-thetic consciousness (notably, shame) presupposes, on reflexion, an “intermonadic relation”, our consciousnesses are *de facto* related, and the difficulty instead resides in accounting for their internal relations (BN, 246). This brings us to a new aporia in the section entitled “My Fellow”.<sup>47</sup> Here, Sartre considers whether the other could be the “center of reference” to which meanings I discover as “already mine” would refer (BN, 531). Could the distinction of individuals among themselves cast doubt on their relations by means of language?

To answer this question, Sartre targets the idea that the meanings of one’s world are discovered solely against the yardstick of one’s aims. Its counterpart would be that one can decide the meaning of an obstacle or a standpoint. For example, one’s choice to climb a mountain could account for the

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<sup>47</sup> I translate the title as “My Fellow” rather than “My Neighbour” in order not to suggest the primacy of a relation of acquaintance.

difficulty of climbing it. As a monad, I could accredit the conformity of this difficulty to my representation of it, as everything would depend on the imaginary point of view I take. Sartre diagnoses the difficulty raised by such conceptions thusly:

We have seen that this monadic conception conceals a hidden solipsism precisely because it is going to confuse the plurality of meanings which I can attach to the real and the plurality of meaningful systems each one of which refer to a consciousness which I am not. (BN, 531)

Sartre grants that one can attach meanings to the real, as exemplified by the practice of using dolls to reconstitute a car crash in order to determine responsibilities (as considered by Wittgenstein and previously commented in section 3.2.1). However, each ascribed meaning involves a meaningful system, inasmuch as its determinacy implies its difference from other meanings. The possibility of variation between meaningful systems thus ought to be considered. Could meaning be accounted for solely on the basis of its arbitrary attachment to the real by an individual? Were this the case, the meanings unveiled to my consciousness as “already mine” could also be attached to and imposed upon me by the other.

However, Sartre purports to show that admitting this is not required and, furthermore, that it is misleading. That is to say, presupposing that a choice made in the first person always admits other possible meanings presupposes detaching oneself from the meanings of one’s actions (BN, 531).

An “action”, as I use this expression after Anscombe (2000, p. 38), means an action which is intentional under a given description: “‘He is X-ing’ is a description of an intentional action if (a) it is true and (b) there is such a thing as an answer [...] to the question ‘Why are you X-ing?’”. The sense of the question “Why?” that is considered here is one in which it is given an application, which means that its answer, if positive, gives a reason for acting (Anscombe, 2000, p. 9). For example, answering “why are you calling for a cab?” with “I am calling a cab in order to reach the airport in time”. In this specific sense, the question “Why?” suffices to consider descriptions which are relevant to characterizing what someone is doing intentionally and only such descriptions. Indeed, answers to “Why?” questions which rely solely on someone’s knowledge of anatomy are ruled out, as they do not give a reason for acting. An exception here would be if we consider a case where someone plans either to exemplify or produce a sample of something which implies such knowledge; but then, such cases do not call into

question the applicability of the “Why?” question in the specified sense (Anscombe, 2000, p. 38). Anscombe (2000, p. 39) emphasizes that in ordinary circumstances, a description such as “He is X-ing” suffices to answer a “Why?” question bearing on someone’s action, and thereby to characterize it as an intentional action. This means that after having answered a “Why?” question bearing on one’s action with “in order to X”, and being asked anew “Why are you X-ing?”, one cannot reply either “Oh, I did not know I was doing that” or refuse any sense except a causal one to the questions that are asked without calling into question the sense of one’s answers (Anscombe, 2000, p. 39).

So, if it seems that there could always be other possible meanings to what someone else does, then it could be that I am uncertain about the meaning of what I do, and that I assume that my choices could always have other “possible” meanings. By raising this issue, Sartre confronts two approaches to action in the first person: the behaviourist and the hermeneutical approaches. On the one hand, behaviourism (as presented by Watson) purports to exclude first-person certainty: because one cannot observe oneself in the first person while acting, one cannot know with certainty what one does, in which case only hypotheses are available concerning what one does.

On the other hand, at the end of the third part of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre suggests the insufficiency of Heidegger’s hermeneutical description. On the basis of this approach, interpretations, in probable or hypothetical terms, would suffice to account for the intelligibility of action in the first person. This conception is diametrically opposed to behaviourism, since one would always be better positioned than someone else to know what one does, but could still only interpret one’s actions. However, in this case, it would be as if one could always relevantly doubt the meaning of one’s actions. The section “My Fellow” in fact begins by addressing this difficulty. Encounters with “the other” are taken to be coincidences inasmuch as it is presupposed that “my fellow” could have been missing from the world. Sartre previously criticized Heidegger’s conception of the “*mit-sein*” (being-with) in *Being and Nothingness*. Hoping our acting in unison presupposes that we are all related, as if we were members of a single team or crew (BN, 270).

This accordingly requires an account of language which suffices to explain the intelligibility of my actions with respect to my fellow, but which nevertheless does not presuppose that I am in principle always better positioned than my

fellow to specify the meanings of my actions. In other words, the difficulty is providing an account that suffices to internalize the distinction between “the other” and “my fellow”. This amounts to suggesting that it is from a standpoint which could not be exclusive, within given situations who meaning is public, that such a distinction can be marked. The presupposition that there could be an exclusive impersonal perspective from which it could be marked, independently from any conceivable situation and expression, is the difficulty that Sartre addresses.

To do so, Sartre distinguishes between meanings which obviously do not result from the stipulations of a single consciousness (“streets”, “houses”, etc.) with meanings that one can assume, in solitude, to confer upon what unveils. In solitude, the “unpredictable and brute existent”, or “this existent here and outside of it nothing”, can be unveiled to a consciousness (BN, 532). On such occasions, a single consciousness confers, through minimal evaluation, a meaning to such existents as “to climb”, “to avoid” or “to contemplate”. However, the meaning of “house” cannot be accounted for on this model of arbitrary attachment. Sartre here criticizes the view addressed by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* (i.e., that sense could result from the arbitrary attachment of labels to things).

Although the meaning of “house” is contingent, it resists one’s reflexion and does not depend on one’s concrete existence or choices because it has become a quality of the in-itself. Similarly, one discovers that the difficulty of handling situations is relative to the way in which they are handled (what Sartre calls “the coefficient of the adversity of things”) before feeling them through indications such as “slow down” or “dangerous turn”. Such indications inform one of the determinate and relevant attitudes to be endorsed. Could they also indicate the “narrow limits to my freedom” (BN, 532)?

Following indications provided by others is necessary in order to situate oneself and act. Such indications are often imperatives, such as “entrance” (“enter this way”) or “exit” (“exit this way”), addressed to anyone. If one takes such imperatives as constraints to which one must “submit” (as if obstacles), then the world apprehended through the use of techniques (e.g., using a bicycle or taking a train) “reveals to me a countenance strictly correlative with the means I employ; therefore, it is *the countenance which the world offers to everybody*” (BN, 533). This implies a disjunction: either I can acknowledge that this countenance is

offered to everybody, in which case it is within the situations I encounter that I can situate myself as anyone; or I can refuse to admit that this countenance is offered to everybody, in which case everything happens as if a state is imposed on me.

To address this tension, Sartre regresses to facticity (or contingent necessity) inasmuch as it is indubitable (*ibid.*); it is a fact that I belong to an inhabited world in which other minds exist. As mentioned in chapter 2 (cf. 2.2.2.), calling into question linguistically the fact of the existence of others amounts to denying their existence (except in contexts where the production of a fiction staging such denial is that which is explicitly intended). But it further appears, retrospectively, that this fact held prior to one's coming into existence in an inhabited world. Sartre can now suggest that the world unveils itself to individuals by means of collective techniques designed to enable individuals to apprehend it under determinate aspects. The meaning of collective techniques of appropriation of the world, already constituted and defined as such by others, is presupposed by one's belonging to collectives, such as the human species, nationalities, or familial and professional groups. Notably, Sartre characterizes one's belonging to the human species as follows:

Belonging to *the human species* is defined by the use of very elementary and very general techniques: to know how to walk, to know how to take hold, to know to pass judgment on the surface and the relative size of perceived objects, to know how to speak, to how in general distinguish the true from the false, etc. (BN, 533)

Although the appropriation of elementary and general techniques is presupposed by one's relation to the world among others, Sartre rejects the idea that appropriation of such elementary techniques involves their ownership "under an abstract and universal form" (*ibid.*). He criticizes, as does Wittgenstein, explanations according to which the "ownership" of language explains one's belonging to the human species from a non-situated perspective, that is, from nowhere. In this approach, the alleged opposition between the individual in its local situation within a collectivity (e.g., a national one) and the universal stems from the assumption that one must abstractly own the knowledge of the activity which consists in naming and understanding words in general. Such approaches presuppose that a mediation could be missing between, on the one hand, the individual in his or her local situation within a collectivity (national, regional, etc.) and, on the other hand, the universal. Adopting this perspective would imply

granting that my national tongue or dialect were only an inferior version of the universal. To resolve this tension, Sartre first suggests that the appropriative dimension of language is necessary and sufficient to render clear the superfluity of a mediation between the individual and the universal (BN, 533-534). Second, he rejects the idea that there is any such thing as an internal opposition or incompatibility between the concepts of “dialect”, “tongue” and “language”.

Thus, if it is granted that there is no such thing as a restrictive limit separating the individual from the universal, then one can consider “the universal and perfectly simple essence of any technique whatsoever by which any being whatsoever appropriates the world” (BN, 534).

This shows that anyone who inhabits the world among others appropriates the world in an ordinary manner with ordinary techniques. Sartre characterizes this by specifying two clauses. The first clause is universality: all techniques have in common that they are ways of making what *a fortiori* anyone can use in order to achieve what these techniques enable. The second clause is essentiality: there is no such thing as a technique that, in principle, could not be used by others.

In the absence of the requirement of mediation between the individual in a particular situation and the universal, the significance of the difficulty of surmounting an obstacle (e.g., on the occasion of climbing a mountain) is relative to a local context where a technique (e.g., climbing) has been appropriated in the past (BN, 534). Distinct individuals use distinct techniques in distinct places and in distinct manners in order to realize similar activities. Nevertheless, that one has learned, for example, to ski or cycle in a determinate locality involves one’s past appropriation of a technique that was locally available. Does this approach imply that an individual is limited by having to appropriate techniques that are available locally? Does the local character of the techniques that are appropriated not involve a restriction?

Sartre has, up to this point, attempted to show that one’s consciousness of the world is not revealed solely as “brute existents”, that is, as if the meaning of what is unveiled could be reduced to the projection of an arbitrary signification. Sartre here challenges Heidegger’s approach: to admit that one is “thrown into the world” does not amount to admitting that one is thrown into *any* world. Similarly to Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, Sartre underscores that it is not any

world into which one could find oneself “thrown”, but rather one that can be characterized, in Sartre’s examples, as “meridional”, “French” or “working class”.

Does Sartre imply a certain approach to the local according to which a dialect could be an “absolutely concrete reality” (BN, 535)? If one appropriates a language by use of a dialect, can one determine “the laws” of language via the study of jargon and patois? Rejecting such approaches, Sartre sides with psychologists who regard the sentence as the elementary structure of speech (*ibid.*). In granting the primacy of the sense of the sentence over its constituents (words), Sartre’s approach is similar to that of Wittgenstein. Outside the sentence, a word is either a “mere propositional function” (i.e., a component of a proposition accounted for in instrumental terms) or “a pure and simple rubric designed to group absolutely disparate meanings” (i.e., a label categorizing various uses) (BN, 535).

For cases where a word may “appear alone” in a discourse, it takes on a “holophrastic character” that presupposes its integration into a context, as a “secondary form” to a “principal form” (BN, 536). It is within a context that the utterance of a single word can mean something that can be rephrased as a sentence: “the word thus has only *virtual* existence outside of the complex and active organizations which integrate it” (BN, 535-536). Furthermore, that a single word can sometimes convey a meaning that could have been expressed by means of a sentence is a point that can be generalized, for considering a word in the light of a sentence in which it could have been used suffices to understand “any given whatsoever in terms of the situation and to understand the situation in the light of the original ends” (BN, 536).

Sartre thereby proposes considering a sentence as a constructive act in which a transcendence exceeds and nihilates a given towards an end. Sartre thus rejects conceptions according to which the *pre-existence* of words, syntax and “readymade sentences” would be required to ground the intelligibility of language (BN, 536). To flesh out his approach, Sartre underlines how spoken language is always deciphered in a given situation with this example: it suffices to have read bad news in the newspaper and to see Pierre’s unhappy face to understand why he says that “things are not so good”, despite him otherwise looking healthy. One can already guess the probable answer when asking “are you fine?” Accordingly, listening to someone is “to speak with” them. To listen to someone is to project oneself towards the possibilities considered by someone else, acknowledging that

it is necessary to consider these possibilities against the background of the world. “Readymade sentences” or, more generally, the assumption that “the sentence pre-exists the word” (BN, 536) thus refer to the “talker”<sup>48</sup> as the concrete ground of discourse.

Understanding a sentence as a constructive act is tantamount to assuming that its intelligibility has for its non-thetic counterpart the nihilation of the given (or a determinate pre-reflexive consciousness) that one wishes to designate (e.g., having seen that Pierre is not so well, I ask him “How are you?”) in light of an aim (its designation: e.g., to know how someone is or to engage with Pierre). One uses words to mean what one means. However, when neither the given nor the aim enable determining what someone means and another sentence is required to clarify the given and understand the word, then one’s sentence is understood by someone else as “a moment of the free choice of myself” (BN, 536).

The treatment of such a “free act” as an “aggregation” of words can thus be rejected, for this would involve believing that such an act could be reduced to the misuse of technical recipes (i.e., pre-determined rules). It should then be acknowledged that factual limits could be *imposed* upon the freedom of the speaker, allegedly coming from an “impersonal life” that belongs to language. Sartre’s diagnoses approaches which reduce sentences to aggregations of words in this way as equivalent to approaching language once it is already dead, that is to say, once it has been spoken (BN, 537).

He also suggests that doing so is a mistake, both for language and for all similar techniques, because the counterpart of the assumption that techniques could apply by themselves is the reduction of the role of the human to that of a pilot (BN, 537). Thus, if our actions are straightforwardly intelligible to others, the conception of sentences as agglomerations of words that pre-exist their utterance should be rejected. Such rejection is not the same as suppressing “the *necessary* or *technical* or *de facto* links which articulate themselves within the sentence” (BN, 538). Rather, Sartre purports to show that “freedom is the only possible foundation of the laws of language” (BN, 538).

The import of Sartre’s approach is that it is public and non-contrastive. That is to say, granting that freedom is the unique idea that can provide

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<sup>48</sup> I translate “*parleur*” as “talker” literally in order to preserve the idiom of “speaker”, as Sartre does in the text, for another role that shall soon be studied.

foundations for the laws of language amounts to appealing for acknowledgement of the public character of language in a non-prescriptive and non-exclusive way. If this approach is not prescriptive, it is because it rejects the view that the meaning of a sentence results from its pre-established conformity with a model. Accordingly, grammar cannot and need not restrict speech in any sense. Rather, “it is by speaking that I make grammar” (BN, 538).

If this approach is inclusive, it is because it rejects probabilistic approaches to meaning, which are confusing inasmuch as they unduly exploit one’s possibility of taking on the point of view of another person by considering a sentence *as if* it was written by someone else (BN, 538). Sartre has in mind the approach of Denis de Rougemont (1944, p. 22), who assumed the “Devil” could be portrayed as “No-body”. In this approach, the problem would be that “Nobody himself remains Someone” (Rougemont, 1944, p. 32), which presupposes that “No-body” could be identified. That is to say, De Rougemont notably considers violent rulers of the time as incarnations of “No-body” and appeals to the constitution of a new political body, an international federation that would sanctify the “Person” in response. This involves a difficulty that was evoked in section 1.2.3. In *Through the Looking Glass*, the King wishes he had “the eyes” of Alice in order to see “Nobody” at a distance (Carroll, 2009, p. 199). Carroll here suggests a difficulty which, under a description, is similar to the one that Sartre addresses. The pretence to identify the “Devil’s share” that some individuals would embody, or, what amounts to the same, the identification of “No-body” among us presupposes that it could and should be granted that someone could see and judge an individual from an outer perspective on the world.

In the context of the Second World War, Sartre purports to provide *public* means for establishing the superfluity and misleading nature of such conceptions. He purports to provide public means to confront both the ideologies of the time and the criticisms of these ideologies which rely on similar assumptions. In this, I suggest, there is both a deep shared concern and a line of agreement between Sartre’s and Wittgenstein’s approaches, if we read the latter with Anscombe, Cavell and Read.

Rougemont (1944, p. 80; p. 87) indeed often suggests that we should not make exceptions between ourselves as people; that there is a sense in which there is no one with whom we have nothing in common. And how could this be relevantly rejected, whoever we are talking about? Rougemont, nevertheless,

does not make the task easier for us by taking Hitler as his example. He suggests it is all too easy to blame an individual characterized as monstrous, to single him out alone as the bearer of a responsibility which is collective (Rougemont, 1944, p. 83). And surely, it cannot and need not be granted that anyone should be given a specific treatment for his actions on the bases of an arbitrary characterisation, whoever it is. As Cavell (1979, p. 109) writes, “Nothing is more human than the wish to deny one’s humanity, or to assert it at the expense of others”. Making an exception could amount to acknowledge one’s wish own of denial.

But can we and do we need to follow Rougemont (1944, p. 27; p. 89) when he writes:

If one says to me: “The Devil is nothing but a myth, thus it does not exist” – rationalist formula – I answer: “The Devil is a myth, thus it exists and does not cease to act” [...]

Look at the Devil which is among us! Cease to believe that he can only look like Hitler or his imitators, for *it is to yourself that he will manage to look the most!* It is only in you that you will catch it in the act. And only then, you will be in a fit state to detect it in others, and to fight it there with success.

It can surely be granted that, in virtue of human actions, there are myths, and that their reality as such should not be denied altogether. However, according to the way in which Rougemont puts it, our criteria could be and would be defeated in advance; and they further would require to be revised on private bases. This difficulty confronted by Sartre is close to the difficulty confronted by Anscombe in *Intention*. I earlier mentioned that she underscores that in ordinary circumstances, a description such as “He is X-ing” suffices to answer a “Why?” question bearing on someone’s action and thereby to characterize it as an intentional action. This implies that once an answer is given to such “Why?” questions, one cannot reply either “Oh, I did not know I was doing that” or refuse any sense except a causal one to the questions that are asked without calling into question the sense of one’s answers (Anscombe, 2000, p. 39). However, according to Rougemont, one could revise the sense of one’s answers to a “Why?” question bearing on one’s actions by appealing to an ability to recognize the action of an entity whose existence is, under his own terms, to be inferred from a myth.

Sartre has already rejected that consciousness and intentionality could be accounted for by appealing to the presence or absence of intentional objects in one’s mind (BN, 50-51). Consciousness is not a container. Thus, this difficulty raised by appeals to a private detection ability cannot be addressed in similar

terms. As Sartre suggests, we can, nevertheless, provide means whose standards are public and sufficient, in that they do not presuppose that one could be in a better situation than the other in order to evaluate the meaning of one's actions, including what one has written. To do so, Sartre analyses the minimal conditions under which one could "discover" the "Devil's share". He first suggests that what he calls the "laws of language" are not apprehended by "the one who talks" (someone addressing others by means of speech), but by "the one who listens" (someone addressed by someone else during one's speech). That is to say, the one who talks (i.e., "the talker") "apprehends the order of words only insofar as he makes it" (BN, 538). Thus, the sole relations that the one who talks apprehends within the complex of words uttered are those taken to have been specifically established. Then, against the background of the previously developed conception of sentences, if the "Devil's share" is taken to be discovered and described by someone, thereby endorsing the role of "the speaker". This implies that: (i) words have been gathered and presented via a *free* meaningful connection; (ii) this synthesis has been seen as if from the outside, which is to say as if by someone else, during a hypothetical deciphering of its possible meanings.

In such cases, as the alleged discoverer of the "Devil's share", the speaker treats every word *first* as a crossroads of meanings referring to other words and treats every link between those words as susceptible to multiple interpretations. He or she focuses on one sense expressly willed to be "true", which can subordinate or leave obscure other senses, but which nevertheless will not suppress them.

Thus, the previously mentioned "moment of the free choice of myself" (BN, 537) is the obverse of one's exemption from laws that are taken to be specific to the other (BN, 538). Sartre here underlines, as suggested earlier with respect to Wittgenstein, that language unavoidably displays our pretences with respect to others: "thus we can grasp the clear distinction between the event 'sentence' and a natural event" (BN, 538). Sartre means that unlike a natural event which occurs in conformity with a law that it manifests, the composition of a sentence manifests the resort to a free project of designation via the personal choice of the for-itself that requires interpretation against the background of a global situation.

Sartre's conception of what he calls the "laws of language", grounded in freedom, precludes the possibility that anyone's rights should come at the

exclusion of anyone else's. There is thus no such thing as a law of speech which could precede one's speaking, no such thing as a legitimate law of silence. In this approach, saying *is* showing; attempts on us by individuals show.

Thus, the circularity of language and thought is unproblematic and characteristic of the concept of situation (BN, 539). There is no such thing as getting "out" of this circle or thinking about it from "an other side" (BN, 539). Both "imageless and wordless thoughts" and "verbal images" are "pure psychological idols". This approach furthermore stresses that the intelligibility of human art and techniques, as possibilities available to humans, requires that they manifest themselves through their enactment (BN, 540). This suffices, according to Sartre, in order to outline "a solution for the relation between the individual and the species" (ibid.). Considered abstractly, the human species is required to unify individual choices, without which the assignment of laws would not be possible (ibid.). In this respect, anyone's belonging to the human species is presupposed. On the other hand, considered concretely, such an approach does not presuppose that the species is a constraining given "within" the individual:

The for-itself, in order to choose itself as a *person* effects the existence of an internal organization which the for-itself surpasses towards [*oneself*] (*lui-même*), and this internal technical organization is in it the national or the human. (Translation modified, BN, 540)

As mentioned earlier, Sartre's approach should be understood in the context of the Second World War. He does not reject the idea of human nature (cf. BN, 558; 587), but he does question the idea of a human nature that would imply its pre-determination, as well as the either restrictive or restricted conception of finitude that goes with this. Thereby, he calls into question the requirement for and relevance of conceptions of the world which presuppose an "unavoidable harmony" between thought and world as the counterpart of the "despotic necessity" that links unrelated events and that some individuals imply to have discovered.<sup>49</sup> On such an approach, some events would have to happen, no matter the circumstances. In Sartre's approach, reflexion on the concepts of the national and the human cannot and need not unfold content that would provide grounds for a "despotic" conception of necessity. His approach is in this respect compatible with both early and late Wittgenstein (see PI, §437). Similarly to the *Tractatus* and to the *Investigations, Being and Nothingness* was written

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<sup>49</sup> As in so-called "plot theories". On this, see Burgess (2012, p. 71).

during war times; at moments where confidence can easily be lost in our criteria, our institutions. Read suggests concerning the *Investigations*: “Wittgenstein offers counter-propaganda. To undermine the hold upon us that dangerous propaganda can easily attain” (2012, p. 176). The same can be suggested concerning Sartre. In his approach, to choose oneself as a person is *first* to acknowledge the commonality of our shared techniques, inasmuch as agreement *can* be reached in language.

#### 4.1.2. The Subordination of my Language to that of Others

Sartre then considers the objection according to which my language would be restrictively subordinated to that of the other (which could, for example, be addressed from the “personalist” perspective advocated by de Rougemont):

Very well, someone will say. But you have dodged the question. For these linguistic or technical organizations have not been created by the for-itself so that it may find itself; it has got them from others. The rule for the agreement of the participles does not exist, I admit, outside of the free rapprochement of concrete participles in view of an end of a particular designation. But when I employ this rule, I have learned it from others; it is because others, in their personal projects cause it to be that I make use of it myself. My speech is then subordinated to the speech of others and ultimately to the national speech. (BN, 540)

Could I not, then, acknowledge use of “the rule of the agreement of the participles” to be “causally justified” in order to designate some individuals, inasmuch as others do so to achieve their personal projects? Is not the “designating” use of language be appropriate due to the subordination of my use of language to the speech of others and, ultimately, to national speech?

This objection can be unfolded as follows: by means of a sentence, such as “judging from his expression, he has been having a hard time”, one can express a judgement which bears on someone else (independently from considering one’s reasons for expressing such a judgement). In sentences of this form, the subject of the adverbial participle clause differs from the subject of the main clause. This is sometimes called a “distancing” use of language. Such use contrasts with sentences where the subject of the adverbial clause is identical with the subject of the main clause, as in “waiting for Paul at the café, I was reading the newspapers”. With such a sentence, one can report that one was reading while waiting for someone else called Paul. In this case, one is neither indifferent to the absence of

someone else under every description nor indifferent to one's action under every description. If the reported event happened, the sentence is used to report one's past involvement in realizing intentionally an action while expecting someone else. Such a report thus involves one's passivity with respect to the absence of a determinate person, as well as one's involvement in an activity.

Sartre then considers whether one can "causally justify" the systematic employment of the "rule of the agreement of participles" in a way which would confuse the two ranges of case distinguished above (e.g., by allegedly denouncing our indifference to "No-body"). To grant that the use of language to distance oneself from a situation could simply be equated with the use of language to report a situation, would imply granting that nothing would distinguish one's involvement in a situation from a confinement, as if a situation could constitute a restrictive limit. In other words, in this approach, what would be rendered difficult to account for is the intelligibility of the distinction between a situation of confinement and other situations. Sartre suggests both the superfluity and the misleadingness of such a move:

We should not think of denying this fact. For that matter our problem is not to show that the for-itself is the free foundation of its being; the for-itself is free but in *condition*, and it is the relation of this condition to freedom that [we seek to render clear under the name of situation].  
(Translation modified, BN, 540)

In order to show that one's confinement to a situation is a pseudo-problem, Sartre distinguishes his approach from the idea that the for-itself could be equated with "the free foundation of its being". At issue is the intelligibility of the conditional "surpassing" of the for-itself towards oneself (*lui-même*). Were the human contained in the for-itself as a pre-determined "given", one could discover in-itself an unconditional freedom (as the opposite of a "despotic necessity"). However, the obverse of such an alleged discovery would be an unsurmountable alienation or confinement. As an alternative, Sartre suggests that the conditionality of situated reasoning can be internalized, inasmuch as one could not have been indifferent to nobody anyway. There is no such thing as reporting the alleged presence of "nobody" or using language to distance oneself from "nobody".

The difficulty Sartre considers here is related to the reflexive stance of the for-itself with respect to others: "the for-itself arises in a world which is a world for other for-itselfs. Such is the *given*" (BN, 541). Thereby, on the one hand, in the

absence of circumstantial acknowledgment of the limits of one's freedom with respect to others, the meaning of the world remains "alien" to the for-itself. On the other hand, "the for-itself experiences itself as an object in the Universe beneath the Other's look" (BN, 541). Others are thought as objects which indicate the ends the for-itself should follow. Conversely, conducts to follow are assimilated to objects one could choose to endorse to fulfil one's ends exclusively. But, inasmuch as the for-itself assumes both that the ends determine the means and that the means determine the ends, what the for-itself reaches towards is a world "populated with ends" (BN, 542). However, what the for-itself misses is the extent to which its freedom is complicated by its own "historicizing" (*historialisation*):

For to be free is not to choose the historic world in which one arises – that which would have no sense – but to choose oneself in the world whatever this may be. (BN, 542)

To address this difficulty Sartre proposes a reflexion on counterfactuals. The absurdity of some counterfactuals testify to the irrelevance of the supposition that the present state of techniques and language impose restrictions on what someone could think or do. For instance, one could say that Duns Scotus was ignorant of the use of cars and planes, but that would suppose that Duns Scotus could have been ignorant of the existence of cars and planes. Here, the situation of someone from the past is evaluated in light of an actual or current point of view, but Duns Scotus could not have been ignorant of the existence of techniques that did not exist at the time. The idea that Duns Scotus was thus *deprived* of knowledge of their existence (inasmuch as he is qualified to be "ignorant" of them) presupposes that one's past situation is taken to have been *deprived* of the means that we have in our actual situation.

Conversely, one can also imagine the situation of a for-itself which historicizes its existence at the time of Duns Scotus, thereby nihilating its existence in that world. Such a for-itself would thereby nihilate its existence in a world which was, as ours, "all that it may be". Sartre presents additional counterfactuals to strengthen this point. For example, "the Albigenses lacked heavy artillery to use in resisting Simon de Montfort" (BN, 543). Here again, as heavy artillery is a military technology that was invented at a later time, it was not a possibility available to the Albigenses, so the counterfactual is simply absurd. The difficulty thus stems from the misleading assumption that one could

somehow *situate* logical space. A gratuitous negation – “Duns Scotus did *not* know how to use a plane” – is taken for a privation. However, Sartre stresses that “such a nothingness *can in no way limit* the For-itself who is choosing itself; it cannot be apprehended as a lack, no matter how we consider it” (BN, 543).

Sartre further suggests that this point applies not only to material means but also to “subtler techniques”: “the fact of existing as a little lord of Languedoc at the time of Raymond VI” is not *determinative* if one is considering the feudal world where this lord existed. That is to say, once the circumstances of one’s time are taken into account, it no longer appears that one was determined to conduct oneself in a particular way. The alleged determination of one’s conduct appears as a privation insofar as it is considered in light of another time: “the feudal world offered to the vassal lord of Raymond VI infinite possibilities of choice; we do not own anymore” (BN, 543). Whenever one supposes that someone else could have been *deprived* of means and possibilities from a later time, one evaluates a situation from the past in light of an actual or current point of view.

Sartre links this confusion to the possibility of the for-itself affirming itself before another mind that is taken for an object (*l’autre-objet*), which coincides with the discovery of “techniques” that the for-itself can appropriate or interiorize. This interiorization involves two things: the instrumentalization of the technique for one’s own ends and the deterioration of the technique that is appropriated (BN, 544). Sartre can thus provide the first element of an answer to the objection that one’s appropriation of the language of the other should be taken as a restriction:

Feudalism as a technical relation between man and man does not exist; it is only a pure abstract, sustained and surpassed by the thousands of individual projects of a particular man who is a liege in relation to his lord. (ibid.)

Rejecting the idea that feudalism is reducible “to the sum of the relation of relations between vassals and suzerains”, Sartre suggests that it instead constitutes “the structure of these relations” or the exact abstract moment that must be transcended towards the concrete in order for a human of one’s time to realize a project. For although the feudal technique is embodied in any individual conduct and can be brought out, it is “there to be overcome” (BN, 543).

This proposition does not involve rejecting the idea that the existence of the other implies a *de facto* limit to one’s existence (ibid.), for it is through my appropriation of the language of the other that certain unchosen but

characteristic determinations appear to me. Sartre considers cases of “total alienation”, including Jewish persons during the Second World War, but also working class people, such as miners, who are deprived of determinate possibilities. Sartre grants that these situations pose a real limit to one’s freedom, inasmuch as ways of being are imposed upon the for-itself *without* freedom as their foundation.

Sartre nevertheless criticizes the idea that such limits should be construed as limitations, since they do not come from the action of the other. What Sartre emphasizes is that it is not obligatory for individuals who are excluded by some discourses to interiorize the discourses which exclude them. Nobody could achieve a perspective from which a given collective hierarchizing, required for practical purposes, could be noted as being identical with a pre-conception about it. He starts by considering the limit case of torture: if one cedes to it, one does so freely (BN, 545). Similarly, to follow an injunction concerning conduct based on certain characteristics involves recognizing its coercive value. Sartre admits that such an injunction preserves its character of “emanation from an alien will” and has the specific structure “of taking me for an object” (BN, 545). Nevertheless, “the true limit” of one’s freedom would lie in apprehending oneself as an object for the other (*l’autre*) within a situation, which thereby becomes interiorized as an objective structure. One’s situation has an *outside*, which thus has a dimension of alienation irrespective of one’s actions (and which can neither be removed nor modified by one’s actions). This limit derives from the fact of the existence of an other mind and can be considered in two manners: either as the objectivation of its being-for-self (*être-pour-soi*) or as the objectivation of being-for-another-mind (*être-pour-autrui*). In the first mode, a consciousness is thematically conscious of how it is for-itself; in the second, a consciousness is thematically conscious of how it is for-another-mind. Together, these limits *represent* the boundaries of my freedom (BN, 546).

The internalization of the distinction between the other (*l’autre*) and another mind (*autrui*) suffices to resolve the tension implied by this two-limits view (BN, 546). Focused on itself, without acknowledging the other, existence-for-itself appeared as if “solely my freedom could limit my freedom”. Nevertheless, if the existence of the other is taken into account, my freedom finds its limits in the existence of the freedom of another mind (*autrui*). At this stage, paralleling

Spinoza's thesis that only thought can limit thought, Sartre suggests that only freedom can limit freedom.

The alienation of the situation as I live it stands neither for an "inner flaw" nor a "given" which would introduce "brute resistance". It amounts, rather, to the exteriority of the situation, that is to say, to how consciousness is thetically conscious of how it stands for the other (*son être-dehors-pour-l'autre*). The character of the situation does not act upon its content. But one can put oneself in a situation by assuming that it could. The paradox is that of a freedom which can will its freedom and, simultaneously, wish such a character. Inasmuch as one is free, one can will one's freedom solely by putting oneself into a situation where one's freedom is compromised (inasmuch as there is nothing in nature which could "constrain" it in this way). To will one's freedom thereby amounts to willing the "passion" of one's freedom, which implies putting oneself in a situation of being a "patient" of one's freedom.

#### 4.1.3. The Limits of Freedom: Internal and External Finitude

In order to resolve this paradox, Sartre underscores that it is superfluous to assume such being-for-another-mind. That is to say, inasmuch as what is alienated exists solely for the other (*l'autre*), it is not necessary to assume it. The feeling of alienation or affection of the alienated situation involves acknowledging a characteristic that does not stem from the other, but rather from the objective limits of my being (my being-such-and-such) in order to realize ends I have chosen (BN, 547). One can objectivate one's situation.

Sartre does not reject the idea that one has characteristics or claim that they are unreal. He calls them "unrealizables" and distinguishes them from "imaginaries" (BN, 548). "Unrealizables" are "infinite" inasmuch as they stand for or represent the opposite of the situation. They are exemplified in the following way: at one's return to a place (e.g., Paris) from which one has been absent for a long time, one can feel as if cut off from "a promised land". Familiar objects stand where they are left, yet "I am only an absence, only the pure nothingness which is necessary in order that there be a Paris" (BN, 548). This approach accounts for the discrepancy which occurs when someone applies a double-standard to judging similar actions differently according to their author; for when someone else does it, someone else's action is *a* given object of moral appreciation. If one rejects

applying the same standards to oneself, then, obviously, one does not evaluate one's actions in the same way:

In short, therefrom, this is the origin of all the anguish of a "bad conscience," that is, the consciousness of bad faith which has for its ideal a self-judgement – i.e. taking toward oneself the point of view of the Other. (BN, 549)

In such cases, the unrealizables are not apprehended as such. It is, as suggested previously, in light of a determinate end that they are apprehended as "to be realized". The law of my freedom – that one cannot be without choosing oneself – applies. I can attempt to be for me (in the objective mode) what I am for the other only by choosing *how* I appear to the other. But this amounts to an elective assumption by which I attempt to choose how I would need to be chosen. Yet, attempting to judge oneself from the point of view of the other amounts to prejudging oneself (by comparison with learning about oneself from someone else).

Although I dispose of an infinity of ways to assume my-being-for-another-mind (*mon être-pour-autrui*), I cannot conceive that I do not assume it in one manner. Sartre expresses this point with an embedded double negation: "I cannot not assume it". This formulation suggests that there is no such thing as not assuming how one stands before someone else (BN, 550). Freedom is lived as a condemnation to "facticity" inasmuch as refusing is not equivalent to abstaining. This approach does not amount to granting that "unrealizables" can thereby cease to be limits which are both objective (i.e., inasmuch as they are intelligible to oneself) and external (i.e., inasmuch as they belong to one's situation). Insofar as "unrealizables" are unlike tools discovered by the for-itself as something "to-be-interiorized", they present an obligatory character.

A disjunction is encountered by the for-itself at this stage. Either the limit involved by an "unrealizable-to-be-realized" is taken as an *a priori limit* to one's situation, or one distances oneself from an unrealizable-to-be-realized and takes it as an imperative or an order that implies a restriction (what Sartre calls an "unrealizable" interiorized in exteriority). The for-itself can assume a limit to one's freedom and thereby interiorize the relevance of a given imperative to conduct oneself. Nevertheless, interiorized in exteriority, one can assume that it has been *ordered* to oneself in a way that implies a restriction. In this case, the finitude that is assumed is *external*. That is to say, instead of *realizing*, one chooses to *have* "a being at a distance, which limits all my choices and constitute their reverse side;

that is, I choose that my choice be limited by something other than itself" (BN, 551). By choosing for my freedom to be limited by the freedom of the other, I thereby incorporate limits which are external to the situation from within as "unrealizables" or "unrealizables-to-realize". In such a case, I can become confused in the same way that I can become confused with respect to those from the past; that is, I can think about my situation as if it was *a priori* limited, irrespective of any intelligible circumstance:

For class, for race, for body, for the other, for function, etc., there is a "being-free-for...". By it the For-itself projects itself towards one of its possibles, which is always its *ultimate possible*: for the envisaged possibility is a possibility of seeing itself; that is, of being another than itself to see itself from the outside. (BN, 551)

Sartre considers the last commitment of conceiving reflexion on the basis of the analogy with the visual field: the for-itself can presuppose that it can see itself and thereby attempt to judge itself from the perspective of someone else. In such case, one unreflexively projects oneself towards an "ultimate" which when interiorized becomes a "thematized sense" that is incompatible with any hierarchizing of possibilities.

Insofar as nothing compels someone to hold on to such approach, one can assume the free choice of one's ends among others in the present in ways that are compatible with the freedom of others. If one continues attempting to judge oneself from the standpoint of the other, one risks putting oneself at the mercy of anyone when intending to do a service for or help someone else. Inversely, one might also risk doing a disservice to someone else while believing to have done a service. One will then live one's situation within the limits that one imagines to be imposed by others to the exact extent that one does not assume the limits of one's freedom. Yet freedom can also be lived as internal finitude, as freedom without restriction:

Freedom is total and infinite, which does not mean that it *does not have* limits, but that it *never encounters them*. The only limits which freedom bumps against at each moment are those which it imposes [on] itself and of which we have spoken, concerning the past, with the environment, and with techniques. (BN, 552)

The intelligibility of action implies acknowledgement of conditionality. There is no such thing as ineluctable opposition between limited and unlimited freedom: there are limits to freedom but they do not imply limitations. It is, on the contrary, precisely because there is no such thing as an opposition between

an unlimited and a limited freedom that the illusion of being limited by the past, surroundings, techniques.

#### 4.2. The Subject as a Limit of the World

The counterpart of attempts to discover (see and judge) oneself from the standpoint of the other was addressed in part 4.1. However, an objection that can now be raised is that one could nevertheless attempt to discover oneself in the world. One could attempt to *a priori* interrogate oneself in a way that would rule out the relevance of any advice: can I not attempt to express to myself that I have discovered myself in a way that grounds the idea of a metaphysical solitude that cannot be dispelled? Can I not attempt to use language in a way that I would have inherited from myself?

In this section, I argue that, on Wittgenstein's approach, these questions cannot be answered because "the subject" could not have appeared in, or have been missing from, the register of conceivable discoveries, such that the idea of self-inheritance implied by solipsism can be dispensed with. To do so, in section 4.2.1., I argue that the alternative between a unique universal mind (as implied in transcendentalism) and a unique individual mind (as implied in solipsism) are two sides of a single difficulty. This difficulty is that of a self-discovery. Then, in section 4.2.2., I argue that individuality does not result from the observed ownership of an instance of a "thinking subject" or "representing subject", or from private acquaintance with "sense-data". Finally, in section 4.2.3., I argue that it is both superfluous and misleading to admit that the existence of the subject could be reported in, or absent from, the register of conceivable discoveries.

##### 4.2.1. From a Unique Universal Mind to the Fictive Character which could be "Oneself Alone"

In chapter 1, I considered Wittgenstein's criticism of the idea that one can see nothing but "parts" of the world from an exclusive perspective. Each thing would then be observed as part of a unique spirit common to the whole world. Wittgenstein arguably became familiar with a condensed expression of this view

by reading Emerson's (2000, pp. 113-131) "History".<sup>50</sup> In this essay, Emerson proposes a picture of a unique universal mind whose works are recorded by history and which contains all the facts which precede and succeed an individual's existence. It is obviously intelligible that for an event to happen as planned or for a rule to be implemented, it has to have been foreseen. Some facts are preceded by thought. Emerson (2000, p. 113) nevertheless further affirms: "the thought is always prior to the fact; all the facts of history preëxist in the mind as laws". This approach presupposes that accounting for the intelligibility of all facts would demand their being contained in advance in one unique mind. All events would thus result from this unique mind's application of "his manifold spirit" to "the manifold world". The internal relation of this dual manifoldness in planned events can be granted: in a world, mind can order.<sup>51</sup>

Such an idea does not involve tension with respect to solipsism, for Emerson (2000, p. 113) earlier suggests that "there is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same to all of the same". However, could this be expected from solipsism? And if not, how can solipsism be addressed without undue concession?

This difficulty is linked to the implicit obliteration of the distinction between theatricality and knowledge in solipsism, as mentioned at the end of the first chapter. To provide further clarification, I will consider Emerson's (2000, p. 115) remark concerning his approach to theatre: "All that Shakespeare says of the king, yonder slip of a boy that reads in the corner feels to be true of himself". Emerson suggests that how Shakespeare pictures the king, and thereby feudalism, suggests as much about Shakespeare as about feudalism. This connects to the issue of solipsism inasmuch as Shakespeare presents it in a way that incorporates the aspects differentiated in chapter 3.<sup>52</sup>

I, that have neither pity, love, nor fear. [...]  
 I have no brother, I am like no brother;  
 And this word "love", which greybeards call divine,  
 Be resident in men like one another,  
 And not in me! I am myself alone.  
 (Shakespeare, 2012, *Henry the Sixth*, Third Part, Act 5, Scene 6)

<sup>50</sup> I thank Jonathan Gombin for informing me of Wittgenstein's knowledge of Emerson's essay. See *Wittgenstein: A Life* (McGuinness, 1988, p. 224).

<sup>51</sup> This last point does not, I suggest, depend on transcendentalism. On this, see *Mind and the World-Order* (Lewis, 1929).

<sup>52</sup> I thank Rupert Read for having shown me this text.

The character imagined by Shakespeare confuses solitude and unicity (i.e., the property of an object of which there is one and only one exemplary under a description). Solitude is presented as a state in which “to be oneself” would be rendered possible by using words in a way that implies their assimilation to an essential and private property of a unique individual. Following Sartre’s suggestion, one could say that “the quest for being” provides an implicit motive for the actions of this character. Language could be appropriated by this fictive character exclusively, for he could and would need to inherit his authority from himself in order to ascribe solitude to oneself as an essential property.

This is the difficulty I addressed in the third chapter, which examined how this confusion is dispelled by Wittgenstein in the *Notebooks* and the *Tractatus*. In part 1.2.1., I addressed the implicit assimilation of one’s visual field to a perspective in solipsism. In part 1.2.3., I further explained that rejecting the alleged schema of the visual field presents an ethical dimension, in that it invites distinguishing between knowledge and fiction. Finally, in chapter 3, I tried to explicate how Wittgenstein provides a means to settle the issue of solipsism by dissolving the tension between the impersonal representation of the world and individuals. I rely on Read (2001, p. 466) at this stage to suggest that providing an interpretation that presupposes that solipsism is coherent is not required and is misleading. Doing so would presuppose the conceivability of distinguishing “sorts” of non-sense (Read, 2001, p. 467). I will simply attempt to formulate a tension internal to transcendental idealism in its relation to theatricality in order to address what I assume is the central difficulty implied by solipsism: the conceivability of self-discovery.

The tension between transcendental idealism (as presented in “History”) and solipsism can be phrased as follows: in the idealist approach, it would be necessary to presuppose a unique universal mind in order to account for the intelligibility of history. The public character of language would accordingly enable all of us to take an exclusive perspective on the world. Meanwhile, according to solipsism (in the theatrical approach), only a unique individual mind could take an exclusive perspective on the world. One’s character would be exclusive to one’s constitution. As suggested in section 1.1., the difficulty here is that the presupposition of an exclusive perspective from where we could identify ourselves *a priori* seems to provide the ground for solipsism to affirm one’s ability

to identify oneself exclusively. However, with respect to the impersonal representation of the world by means of completely generalized propositions, nothing compels us to presuppose that nobody could be identified if we could not instantiate or derive individual minds from a universal mind, and thereby that “universal” would need to be contained in “mind” as an essential property. What can be called into question is the requisite of the existence (or pre-existence) of a unique entity from which (necessarily distinct and unique) individuals would need to be derived or instantiated. If such a requirement is admitted, then an impersonal representation, embedded in ordinary language, of the world by means of completely generalized propositions would require the existence of a unique individual (*as if* there could be non-unique ones to be ruled out). Our impersonal representation of the world, designed by humans for humans and for specific purposes, would then be dependent on the existence of a single individual. And then there would be the genius and “the ordinary person, a factory product of nature that is made each day by the thousand” (Schopenhauer, 2010, p. 210).

In the *Tractatus*, the dissolution of the tension between the impersonal representation of the world by means of completely generalized propositions and individuals implies a criticism of the concept of the subject, which is central to philosophies that assimilate the *a priori* with an exclusive perspective from which knowledge could be obtained. The opposite possibility of presupposing an exclusively empirical perspective, from which grammatical subjects of verbs of sentences could be equated with objects to which a proposition would be externally related, would be equally misleading, for it would implicitly assimilate other minds to objects. In order to argue that Wittgenstein provides means to avoid these difficulties, I will now turn to his criticism of the subject.

#### 4.2.2. The Criticism of the Subject in the *Tractatus*

In the section on solipsism, Wittgenstein affirms the superfluity of requiring the existence of “the subject” as presupposed by earlier philosophies:

5.631 – The thinking, representing subject – there is no such thing.  
(Translation by Sullivan, 1996, p. 202)

Wittgenstein rejects the idea that there could be a “thinking subject” as a “thinking thing” (Descartes, 1998, p. 51) or a “representing subject” that must be

presupposed on the basis that “the I think must be able to accompany all my representations” (Kant, 1998, p. 246; B131). In the same move, Wittgenstein draws the reader’s attention to the use of participles as predicates — as if impinged upon a unique entity called “the subject” — in “*thinking* subject” and “*representing* subject”. With respect to language, the criticized approaches presuppose that the verbs of our sentences require reference to a unique entity that could be instantiated by anyone and implied by one’s thought or representations (“the subject”). With respect to the world, the criticized approaches presuppose the requirement of assuring that an individual’s thought has a grasp on the world.

If Wittgenstein’s proposal that “I am my world” in 5.63 is bracketed, then 5.631 can be read as contrasting what can with what cannot be referred to. In this approach, rejecting the requirement of an existing “thinking” or “representing” subject amounts to pretending to rule out its possibility from an *a priori* perspective. However, if it is granted that such an *a priori* contrast is criticized by Wittgenstein, then 5.631 can instead be read as a continuation of an effort to dispel undue requirements. It is unclear that it is necessary to admit that one could informatively “remark upon” or “notice” one’s own existence from an exclusive perspective.

The disjunction noted by Sartre, previously considered in chapter 2 (2.2.2.), is helpful here: either one observes or one imagines. It can further happen that one imagined having observed (e.g., one can imagine having seen something while there was nothing, or one can imagine having seen someone while there was no one). But it is not necessary to admit the opposite, that is, that someone can observe that which one imagines. Nevertheless, nor is it necessary to exclude that someone can observe that which one imagines, as to do so would imply granting that someone could observe that which one imagined. However, implying that someone could observe that which has been imagined would imply a difficulty, for no one else could observe that which they claimed to have observed. In case of confusion, Sartre has a reminder: “nothingness is not, nothingness is-been” (translation mine, BN, 46). A reflexion on the basis of the unreality of the past is superfluous and misleading. In the approach I propose, what Wittgenstein confronts in 5.631 are past attempts to exclude the *possibility* of this difficulty. The rejection of the requirement of the existence of the subject

can be understood as the rejection of an entity whose private ownership would be implied by thought in order to assure its grasp on the world.

That Wittgenstein criticizes the ascription of a grounding role to such a relation of ownership is implicit in his earlier criticism of the epistemologies of Russell and Moore in the *Tractatus* (TLP, 5.541-5.542). In propositional forms such as “A thinks that *p* is the case”, “A thinks *p*” and “A says *p*”, it looks as if “*p*” (which could be substituted with a proposition) is related to the object A (which could be substituted with someone’s name). Wittgenstein rejects such conceptions, which imply that propositional forms relate an object to a fact. The propositional forms mentioned are superficially distinct, yet, according to Wittgenstein, they all are of the form “*p*’ says *p*”. This means that, given a proposition “*p*”, writing that someone thinks or says *p* is writing a distinct proposition (*p*’). Nevertheless, this proposition cannot conceivably show that someone is related to it. For example, (1) “Paul thinks that *War and Peace* is on the shelf in the living room” does not show that “Paul” is related to (2) “*War and Peace* is on the shelf in the living room”. For instance, Paul might think that *War and Peace* is *not* on the shelf in the living room, or perhaps Paul *has not* thought that *War and Peace* is on the shelf in the living room. Conversely what would render (1) true if Paul indeed thinks (2), is what would render (2) true, that is, that *War and Peace* is on the shelf of the living-room. Who Paul is does not depend on his relation to his beliefs (true or false) or the ideas that could be ascribed to him. Another mind is not reducible to a set of correct facts, thoughts or beliefs.

Wittgenstein indeed suggests that that a “composite soul would not be a soul any longer” (TLP, 5.5421). In this approach, it is not necessary to admit that a soul could be divided and that its existence would need to be supposed to assure the unity of its components. Furthermore, supposing that the unity of a soul could be restored by stipulation of an entity or relation is not necessary and is misleading. For example, consider Russell’s (2009, p. 193) ideas after rejecting the position that self-consciousness is consciousness of “our *self*”, wherein he purports to account for self-consciousness in terms of self-acquaintance:

When we try to look into ourselves we always seem to come upon some particular thought or feeling, and not upon the “I” which has the thought or feeling. Nonetheless that there are some reasons for thinking that we are acquainted with the “I”, though the acquaintance is hard to disentangle from other things [...] When a case of acquaintance is one with which I can be acquainted (as I am acquainted with my acquaintance with the sense-datum representing the sun), it is plain that

the person acquainted is myself. Thus when I am acquainted with my seeing the sun, the whole fact with which I am acquainted is “self-acquainted-with-sense-datum”.

The central difficulty in treating “acquaintance with ourselves” as a requirement is that it leads to uncertainty. In Russell’s (2009, p. 194) own terms: “although acquaintance with ourselves seems probably to occur, it is not wise to assert that it undoubtedly does occur”. This implies that there is no such thing as certainty of acquaintance with the “I” or “myself”. The reliance on the idiom of acquaintance to characterize one’s reflexive considerations seems to introduce the possibility that one could encounter “one’s self” and thereby seems to introduce the irremediable possibility of missing such an encounter. If this is the case, what I can learn concerning myself could always be reduced to the immediate result of so-called knowledge by acquaintance with “myself”. But inasmuch as it is uncertain that such an encounter with “myself” could happen, and insofar as I could obtain different sense data by perceiving different entities, then it seems that my reflexive considerations would depend on a form of introspective (and thereby private) acquaintance, the object of which would be “self-acquainted-with-sense-datum”. Sense data would make it plain that it is “myself” who is acquainted with entities insofar as they cannot be shared, except by means of description.<sup>53</sup> To this extent, Russell’s account depends upon a private relation of ownership to anchor thought to world.

In order to avoid the collapse of the question of the existence of the external world into the question of the existence of other minds, the independence of the objects which delimit empirical reality can simply be granted (TLP, 5.5561). This ensures the independence of the knowledge acquired regarding objects by applying determinate ways of studying them. This Kantian line of thought is, I suggest, assumed in the *Tractatus*. Nevertheless, as previously considered, inasmuch as attempting to fix elementary propositions *a priori* leads to non-sense (TLP, 5.5571), it is not necessary to grant the *a priori* limitation of our thought and expression by the “object-centred view”. That is to say, it can be granted to such an approach that new objects can be discovered or produced,

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<sup>53</sup> This explains partially Wittgenstein’s diagnosis, according to which Russell’s theory cannot provide a correct explanation of propositions of the form “A judges that *p*”, as it would allow that a judgement could be passed on a non-sensical proposition (TLP, 5.5422). On Wittgenstein’s criticism of Russell’s conception of acquaintance in relation to the issue of solipsism, see “Does Bismarck have a beetle in his box?” (Diamond, 2005) and McGinn’s (2006, pp. 258-264) response.

which can in turn determine anew how we communicate via propositions. However, it is not necessary to admit that only objects would be available to us as “end-terms” for our thoughts, which is the core assumption of the “object-centred view”. Our thoughts do not require the ownership of a self.

#### 4.2.3. “The World as I found it”

In the introduction of this dissertation, I suggested that the modern problem of the existence of other minds stems from the manner in which the problem of the reality of the external world has been treated. Interrogating the *a priori* conditions bearing on representational activity has been taken to assure the possibility of acquiring objective knowledge from the external world. But the privilege granted to the task of grounding knowledge of phenomena has had, for its counterpart, accrediting that the generalized absence of others could remain conceivable *a posteriori*. Wittgenstein’s reflexion on a fictive book entitled “The World as I found it”, I suggest, calls into question this conflation and thereby this privilege:

5.631 – If I wrote a book “The World as I found it”, I should also have therein to report on my body and say which members obey my will and which do not, etc. This then would be a method of isolating the subject or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject: that is to say, of it alone in this book mention could not be made.

Here, Wittgenstein invites reflexion on the requirements that would bear on the writing of a book entitled “The World as I found it”. Were this book written to conform to the content of its title, it would need to contain the register of the discoveries made by its author. Approached from the “object-centred view”, such a book would need to be exhaustive, since it is the world that is at issue, considered as an empirical totality or as the abstract unity of a collection. Notably, a discovery presupposes that it can be achieved, that is to say, that it can be described as an event that occurred in the past if it happened (similar to what is shown by “I found *War and Peace* on a bookshelf”). Wittgenstein approaches the difficulty implied by admitting the existence of “the subject” from within, without explicitly considering whether and how “The World as I found it” could end, focusing instead on the requirements that would bear on its content. Such a book should contain a report on the body of his author according to the “obedience” of the members of his body to his will. Nevertheless, however detailed the inventory

of discoveries, Wittgenstein suggests that it would effectively show that there is no subject. In short, that the existence of the subject could not have been reported in the register of conceivable discoveries.

Taking this reflexive engagement with a fictive book to attest that its author, implicitly assimilating himself to an instance of the subject (from an impersonal and exclusive perspective), could notice his absence from the register of conceivable discoveries would miss the point. Were the absence of the mention of the subject in the book treated as a negative fact, then it would still be granted that mention of “the subject” could have been made in a way that could have satisfy the inchoate expectation of its author. That is to say, it would still be presupposed that the author of the book could have been the object of his own discovery. The difficulty is that, unlike the verb “heal”, the verbs “discover” and “find” do not have an ordinary reflexive and non-metaphorical use. Notably, Kant (2002, p. 96; §73) characterizes solipsism in the *Second Critique* as “self-seeking” (*selbstsucht*). Kant had the insight that one can indefinitely assume to be “seeking oneself”, just like the “detotalized totality” aimed at coinciding with itself considered by Sartre. Kant suggests the vacuity of such a quest, while Sartre and Wittgenstein suggest that we can realize that it can be dispensed with.

On the reading I propose, Wittgenstein suggests that it is as misleading to expect to appear in the register of conceivable discoveries as it is to be surprised by not appearing in it. That is to say, noting that there is no such thing as self-discovery which would enable self-inheritance is tantamount to acknowledging the misleading nature of the inchoate expectations which are arbitrarily presupposed with respect to logical space. To see someone as an instance of “the ordinary person, a factory product of nature that is made each day by the thousand” (Schopenhauer, 2010, p. 210), one would need to have inherited from oneself the ability to *refer* to oneself as an instance of “the cognizing subject”, which would allow one to count oneself as a “genius”. But if self-discovery never happened, then self-inheritance never happened either.

On this approach, it is not necessary to presuppose that “the subject”, “I” or “self” need to refer. Pace Russell, an acquaintance with “a self” is not required. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein’s proposal to dispense with the requirement of the existence of “the subject” does not amount to making a concession to the “object-centred view”:

5.632 - The subject does not belong to the world but it is a limit (*Grenze*) of the world.

Wittgenstein rejects the view that “the subject” could belong to the world, for this presupposes that individuals indiscriminately labelled as instances of “the subject” could be assimilated to “parts” of the world thought as objects. On such an approach, it could then equally be admitted that “the subject” could be name of any candidate “part” of the world in the visual field (definable ostensively). This directly concerns the collective difficulty considered by Sartre, for this view is at best indifferent with respect to a “despotic” view of necessity according to which events *must* happen unconditionally. A single individual could and would *have* to decide which instances of “the subject” qualify for inclusion in the world and which do not. Is it necessary to grant this at all?

Wittgenstein suggests that this view is a limit of the world. He invites us to appropriate a non-contrastive limit in the use of language, one which does not admit that the evaluation of other minds on the model of labelled objects (or by means of a designating use of language, in the terms of Sartre) is required. If “I am my world” (TLP, 5.63), saying “I see nobody on the road” would not amount to saying that someone called “Nobody” has been seen on the road. “Nobody” is not the name of someone. In the impersonal representation of the world by means of completely generalized propositions, no one could have been nobody. There is no such thing as an individual that could not be one. For “logical constants” are not representatives (TLP, 4.312). Uses of “nobody” can be accounted for in terms of quantificational generality.<sup>54</sup> However, this does not imply that Wittgenstein ever suggests that the impersonal representation of the world by means of completely generalized propositions means that quantificational generality could suffice to account for language.

Indeed, it is unclear in what sense an impersonal representation of the world designed by humans could be said to precede language. As mentioned earlier, Wittgenstein (1998, p. 69) asks us to: “Imagine a language in which, instead of ‘I found nobody in the room’, one said ‘I found Mr. Nobody in the room’. Imagine the philosophical problems which would arise out of such a convention”. We see similar problems when we consider the approach of Denis de Rougemont. However, it is not necessary to admit the superfluous and

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<sup>54</sup> For such an approach, see *Logic: A very short introduction* (Priest, 2000, pp. 17-23).

misleading view that one could identify the “intentions” of an individual from an impersonal private and exclusive perspective. We quantify for specific purposes; however, quantification does not suffice for every specific purpose. Ethics, aesthetics and logic are transcendental (TLP, 6.13; 6.421). The oscillation between, on the one hand, the fiction of an impersonal perspective that would allow us to overcome would-be limitations and, on the other hand, the fiction of a personal perspective that belongs exclusively to one’s constitution and limits one’s thought and expressions can be dispensed with. It is unclear whether there is a choice between these alternatives, as both presuppose the conceivability of an exclusive perspective on the whole, either under the form of a unique universal mind (as in transcendental idealism) or as a unique individual mind or constitution (as in solipsism).

The rejection of the “metaphysical subject” whose presence could be noted somewhere in the world in 5.633 and the rejection of the alleged form of the visual field in 5.6331 can thus be considered anew. According to conceptions which treat “the subject” as a name of a visible “part” of the world,<sup>55</sup> one would have to admit that the existence of other minds depends on observation. However, as we saw with Sartre (cf. section 2.2.2.), certainty of the existence of other minds does not depend on the presence of someone in one’s visual field. Furthermore, if there is no such thing as learning that “the subject” exists by means of observation, then it is superfluous and misleading to conceive the existence of the world and other minds as grounded by a reasoning.

The difficulty arising from admitting that one’s existence is grounded in one’s reasoning is that it leads to confusing doubt with respect to a fiction (i.e., that one can be vaguely uncertain before posing the question of whether the world and others’ minds exist to oneself) with the fiction of a doubt (i.e., the would-be doubt of the existence of the world and other minds). Once one realizes that such doubts are nothing but fictions, one can retrospectively realize that there was no conceivable doubt in this respect. Wittgenstein’s approach to the contingency involved in existence from a first-person perspective recalls Sartre’s pre-reflexive cogito. If it is only rhetorically that I can ask myself whether or not I exist, it is certain that there is the world with others before I posed this question. As with Wittgenstein, this approach does not involve that the pre-reflexive

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<sup>55</sup> Kant (2004, p. 108) proposes such an approach in the *Prolegomena*.

certainty of one's existence is immune to doubt, as if such certainty would be required to resist the corrosive effect of a would-be ineluctable doubt. Rather, it underscores that there is no such thing as a conceivable doubt in this respect.

Admitting that one would need to rely on experience to establish that "the subject" exists, as a label imposed upon individuals from nowhere, presupposes that the existence of other minds could be conjectural or merely probable. However, admitting the conceivability of the *a priori* discovery of essential solitude implies admitting being able to *informatively* remark to oneself that one exists (as if such information could have been missing until it was noted).

Wittgenstein's suggested connection between the rejection of the visual field schema and the criticism of there being an *a priori* order of things (TLP, 5.634) can be considered anew. Wittgenstein indeed rejects the requirement of the assurance that traditional idealism assumed was necessary with respect to the relation between thought and world. To the extent that the subject is assimilated to an entity to which thought would need to refer, a harmony between thought and world would need to be assured, as with Schopenhauer's (2010, pp. 109-110) approach to the relation of the "cognizing subject" with the world. In such an approach, any "part" of experience *must* have an *a priori* counterpart independent from experience, available to thought only. This is precisely the requirement that Wittgenstein rejects. As Sullivan (1996, p. 203) suggests:

An *a priori* order would be an assurance of the harmony through which thinking genuinely engages with the world. But if the very notions of what it is for there to be a world – for logical space to be determined in such and such a way – and of what it is to think – to present a determination of logical space through its coordinates – are already intrinsically tied, then the need for any such assurance falls away.

According to this approach, in its opposition to traditional conceptions of the *a priori*, solipsism could hardly be misled. Transcendental idealism, characterized in chapter 1 as the attitude according to which reality could be evaluated *only* according to an idea, grants *a priori* that we could lack access to reality "as it is" (or in-itself). Everything happens as if the world were out of reach and that we could only rely on representations. Contrary to such idealism, solipsism insists that there is no such thing as an assurance that we share the ideas according to which we evaluate facts or performances. Wittgenstein suggests that the contingency of what is seen and what can be described can and ought to be granted to solipsism.

However, what solipsism misses is the difference in the direction of evaluation. Reality can be evaluated according to an idea, but an idea can also be evaluated according to reality. For example, one can calibrate a project according to available means without thereby renouncing the idea that the project embodies. By contrast, pure realism, which Wittgenstein suggests coincides with solipsism, involves a supplementary clause: that ideas could be evaluated *only* according to reality. That is to say, whatever the idea, reality would be as it is *a priori*, which would mean that expressing an idea would be intrinsically misleading. Any evaluation or measurement would require starting, as it were, from a reality that could not have been independent of thought. The difficulty implied by this view, whether conceived as solipsism or pure realism, is that it implies that experience could be intelligible without valuation. However, considered in its opposition to transcendental idealism, solipsism recalls that using “I” does not require reliance on an identifying conception (conceptions implying that an individual would have to be identified *a priori* from an impersonal perspective). As put by Sullivan (1996, p. 212) : “the subject is a personification of the distance between language and world imposed in the attempt to say that they are not distanced”.

## Conclusion

The question addressed by this thesis was: could one ever discover that one was essentially alone in the world? Against this background, the words “I am alone in the world” or “I alone exist” could seem to express a metaphysical discovery. Yet this question is at odds with the possibility of situating oneself in light of particular circumstances. To this extent, the question can both express and nourish a discrepancy between a feeling of solitude (which can equally obtain when among others) and a situation of solitude (which cannot happen among others). In order to show that the tension between the apparent meaningfulness of the question of non-situated solitude and its possible answers can be resolved, I compared the approaches of Sartre and Wittgenstein. Both authors criticize the conflation of the question of the existence of the external world with the question of the existence of others minds. Although solipsism, as a preliminary procedure, enabled assuring our knowledge of objects, inasmuch as it presupposed the requirement for representational mediation with reality, it leads to assuming the requirement for private representational mediation between individuals. My hypothesis was that the approaches of Sartre and Wittgenstein converge in their attempt to show, from the inside, that admitting a private representational mediation between individuals is tantamount to admitting that the thinkable could be restricted and, thereby, to accrediting the relevance of the illusion of undetectable confinement.

The first chapter was dedicated to explicating the common background against which Sartre and Wittgenstein address the issue of solipsism. For both Sartre and Wittgenstein, solipsism is a difficulty that appears at the intersection of two doctrines: transcendental idealism and metaphysical, or pure, realism. The difficulty raised by these doctrines is that they each presuppose that the thinkable could be restricted. Thereby, these doctrines imply that the illusion of undetectable confinement can and should be accredited. What distinguishes solipsism from these doctrines is its pretence to dispense with others in order to impose arbitrary strictures on the thinkable. The rejection of the alleged schema of “the form of the visual field” and the alleged problem of “inverted vision”, which would require taking up an exclusive perspective from which individuals could be seen as “parts” of the world, thus presents an ethical dimension: it

amounts to a rejection of the gesture of arbitrarily imposing a limit on the thinkable, which cannot but lead to confusion. The similar criticisms of such a gesture made by Sartre and Wittgenstein is thus decisive. In both cases, the author invites us to internalize (i.e., to make our own) how the rejection of such a gesture presents an ethical dimension. At stake is the relevance of the counterfactual scenario of a generalized absence of others, which can be imagined *a posteriori*, but whose *a priori* assumption leads to confusion inasmuch as it amounts, at best, to gratuitously privileging worst conceivable scenarios in order to ground our expressions and actions.

In order to address this issue, in chapter 2 I explored how Sartre resolves the theoretical problem of the existence of others. His answer requires confronting and dispelling the conjectural conception of other minds (such as found in the phenomenologies of his time and in behaviourism), according to which their existence is only probable. This approach is the counterpart of privileging the question of the grounding of our knowledge of objects. The core of Sartre's response is the "Cogito a little expanded", a conceptual means to dispel the relevance of doubt about the existence of other minds. This "Cogito a little expanded" is not a proof of the existence of other minds, as it does not imply admitting the relevance of a generalized absence of other minds. To this extent, Sartre provides conceptual means for establishing that solipsism is philosophically a pseudo-problem. Even from a theoretical perspective, there is no such thing as a reason to presuppose that other minds could inevitably be missing. This, in turn, establishes that the "metaphysical interrogation" of the existence of others ("why are there others?") admits a *de facto* or necessarily *a posteriori* answer once the unrestricted contingency of consciousness is acknowledged. The answer is "this is so", which is equivalent to saying that there is no answer, or that it is a superfluous answer to a question raised from nowhere: "there is no conceivable point of view on the whole: the whole has no 'outside' and the very question of the meaning of its 'flipside' is meaningless" (BN, 325). Nevertheless, the dissolution of the theoretical issue of solipsism does not suffice to address what Sartre calls "a sort of *de facto* solipsism", which raises concrete difficulties: namely, indifference with respect to others or, metaphorically, blindness with respect to others. The difficulty addressed by Sartre has to do with the endorsement of indifference as a concrete way of acting with respect to others.

As a possibly primitive reaction to others, it leads to a desperate and meaningless quest to appropriate the freedom of others. This concerns the core difficulty of solipsism, which is the dissociation of the feeling of solitude from a situation of solitude: inasmuch as the counterpart of the endorsement of indifference is the implicit reduction of others to a means for satisfying one's desires, the connection between the feeling of solitude among others and the lack of such a feeling in situations of solitude is missed. However, Sartre suggests that this is nobody's character, that is to say, that no one could wish this. This leads to reconsidering the linguistic expression of solipsism in philosophy and the sciences, the pretence to draw a restrictive limit to the thinkable.

The third chapter was dedicated to Wittgenstein's dissolution of this theoretical problem by providing a way to settle the issue of solipsism. What needs to be called into question is not only the *a posteriori* possibility of ratifying the conceivability of our confinement to representations, but also the assimilation of the *a priori* to an exclusive perspective from which a decree could imply or preclude our eventual confinement to representations. The appeal to a restrictive limit upon the thinkable presupposed by the claim to occupy such a perspective is questioned from the beginning of the *Tractatus*, particularly in the section on solipsism. Wittgenstein's answer criticizes the conceivability of legislating on sense, that is, of attempting to impose arbitrary strictures on the expression of our thoughts. In comparison to discounting the relevance of a possibility in a given situation during an empirical investigation, the pretence of contrasting what we can refer to with what we cannot refer to, independently from any conceivable situation, presupposes that one could see the world from an outer perspective on the world. However, Wittgenstein suggests that logic could not conceivably be affected by a mistake made by someone. To this extent, appealing to logic (as Frege did) in order to implement procedures of arbitration for conflicts of opinion mirrors the difficulty raised by solipsism.

In order to address this issue without questioning the intelligibility of ordinary language and logic, Wittgenstein suggests that the question "to what extent solipsism is a truth?" can be settled. Furthermore, this can be done without appealing to a law of excluded middle or appointing an arbiter. Addressing this question requires dispelling two alleged options implied by reliance on an analogy with the visual field to account for thinking. The first

alleged option is that of an unavoidable mismatch between thought and reality. Holding on to such a scenario can lead one to assume that one's thought could have been hostage to facts; that it could *always* be relevantly possible that one's representations could be false. This would involve granting that truth could admit gradations. The second alleged option is that of a necessary harmony between thought and reality. Holding on to such a scenario assumes that one's thought might be unfair to facts; that it could always be relevantly possible that one's representations could be true. This would involve granting that facts could admit gradations. Wittgenstein's conception of the proposition as a model of reality enables dispelling these two alleged options. Inasmuch as one can imagine the holding of a determinate fact, one can represent any fact to oneself. And inasmuch as one can express the holding of a fact to others, one cannot be without means to express any fact to others.

Thus, the appeal to settle the issue of solipsism cannot be tied to an ability that one could claim exclusively. Wittgenstein invites the reader to consider this by means of a fictive "language which alone I understand". He thereby provides means to evaluate whether one should accept a discrepancy between what one does not understand and what one means to get shown in one's expressions, which testifies to the ways in which one appropriates language. The detachment of one's feeling of solitude (which can equally obtain among others) and one's effective solitude (which cannot happen among others) could not therefore fail to get shown by one's expressions. It is inasmuch as we cannot and do not need to arbitrate on sense that it is intelligible that what solipsism means "shows itself". In reflexion, the inconceivability of proving the existence of other minds mirrors the inconceivability of disproving the non-existence of other minds. Thus, these alleged possibilities are not relevant. The theoretical issue raised by solipsism can therefore be dissolved without any conceivable proof of the existence of other minds. The central confusion of solipsism, namely, the conflation of solitude with unicity, is grounded in the assumption that the public character of language is an obstacle. On reflexion, this confusion can be dispelled by realizing that solitude does not amount to a specific unicity, but rather the contrary. That is to say, to think of being alone need not amount to thinking about the property of a unique object, for what could distinguish us with respect to uniqueness (i.e., the property of each and every individual) and the ordinary

possibility of solitude? The pretence implied by wishing to dispense with anyone else in an attempt to legislate on the thinkable can simply be discarded without renouncing or submitting to anything. “My world” is perfectly adequate for individuation.

The fourth chapter was dedicated to showing that Sartre and Wittgenstein establish both the superfluity and the misleading nature of the ideas of self-discovery and self-inheritance implied by solipsism. If the solipsist could discover that he is the only one there is, then no one but him could make such a discovery. And if the solipsist could report such discovery, then no one but him could inherit the language to report such discovery from himself. Thus the ideas of both self-inheritance and self-discovery that solipsism implies would be essentially private, or properties essential to a unique individual. Two objections were addressed in this chapter in order to dismiss both the requirement for and the relevance of the inchoate attempt to narrate the alleged discovery of a fiction of solitude from a non-situated perspective. The first objection was that appropriating the language of the other presupposes the subordination of my language to that of the other. However, such subordination cannot be restrictive, as this would imply that the other, and by extension everyone, is restrictively limited by the commonality of language. However, common meanings discovered in the world of which one is not the author are confused with restrictive limits only if one attempts to judge oneself from the standpoint of the other, thereby presupposing one’s ability to discover (see and judge) oneself from an outer perspective on the world. To grant that one cannot attempt to judge oneself without prejudging of oneself suffices to live freedom as internal finitude, or as freedom without limitations.

The second objection regards self-discovery as the ground of self-inheritance, which would enable the exclusive appropriation of language in solipsism. However, such self-discovery would presuppose that one could notice one’s existence independently from one’s world, exactly as when one discovers an object somewhere. To this extent, admitting the possibility of self-discovery is not necessary, for the flipside of the illusion of an *a priori* discovery of solitude (as if one could *a priori* discover the contrary) is the illusion of remarking informatively that one exists (as if one could lack this information *a posteriori* without making such a remark). It would be just as misleading to expect to appear as to be surprised by not appearing in the register of conceivable discoveries. The subject

cannot be understood as a part of the world, but is a limit of the world. That is to say, it is not necessary to admit the existence of “the subject”.

If it seems that “I am essentially alone in the world”, that “I am the only one” or that “there is only me” could express a discovery, it is because one takes “am I essentially alone in the world?”, “am I the only soul?”, or “are there others?” for questions to which one could and should answer. But we can distinguish a doubt that one might have about a fiction (with respect to an undetectable confinement to representations) from the fiction of a doubt that could not be levied in principle (the eventuality of an undetectable confinement). Even considering the fiction of an undetectable confinement implies having appropriated language. Even the counterfactual scenario that seems closest to solipsism, according to which one could be the only person remaining after a catastrophe, implies that the generalized absence of others is considered *a posteriori*. Admitting the *a priori* eventuality of the generalized absence of others is superfluous and necessarily misleading. It implies admitting that one could evaluate one’s situation from nowhere, and thereby implies dispensing with the conditionality implied by our situated thoughts. If one feels alone among others, one can interrogate oneself and eventually find reasons for such a feeling. This manifests our implicit awareness of having a grip on what we are doing.

To conclude, the independence of will from the world cannot conceivably give rise to an obstacle, but is rather a condition of the intelligibility of action and expression. It is insofar as one can foresee that a projected action could fail that one can eventually provide oneself with the determinate means to realize it. One could not be *a priori* restrained, confined or constrained with respect to what one can think or be conscious of. In yielding to the temptation to impute to one’s medium of expression – language – a deficiency (Wittgenstein), or to ascribe an impersonal life to it (Sartre), one risks nothing less than rendering oneself as unintelligible to oneself as to others.

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